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Secondary Education in California and Second Language Research: Instructing ESL Students in the 1990s[1]

Many researchers, including myself, have claimed that second language (L2) research has direct implications for teaching ESL students in the state of California. Researchers have advised public school teachers to provide ESL students with large quantities of unstructured, comprehensible English input (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1985, 1993; Krashen & Terrell, 1983), to reduce the amount of form-focused language instruction that they give their ESL students (Krashen, 1985; Terrell, 1982), to avoid direct, corrective feedback (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1985), and to focus their students' attention solely on the gist of messages rather than on the linguistic forms these messages take. (See, for instance, Cummins, 1986, 1989 and Krashen, 1985.) This paper examines the wisdom of this advice. Here I question: (a) whether the research underlying the advice is dated, applied incorrectly, or misunderstood; and (b) whether California's diverse immigrant populations, populations that have changed dramatically over the past 20 years, have suffered as a result of such advice. By examining data from the University of California at Irvine (UCI), I make the case that L2 students are coming to UCI without sufficient academic English to undertake university coursework successfully, even when they have spent their entire childhoods in California schools and have been educated by teachers who have followed the advice of L2 researchers.

In the first section, I consider the changing demographics of California's schools. The second section reviews research on three factors thought to affect L2 proficiency: input, corrective feedback, and instruction. I conclude by arguing that the research pertaining to these factors, though relevant to the instruction of certain populations in certain locations and at certain times in California's history, cannot be generalized to the many diverse populations of immigrants living in California today. More

specifically, I suggest that learners who have grown up in ethnic communities and who have been exposed to large quantities of comprehensible standard English input—through classes, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, pleasure reading books, and textbooks—are *not* acquiring standard English. Rather, it seems that they are acquiring the nonstandard varieties used by their peers. By *nonstandard varieties*, I refer to those dialects of English that are not used by middle-class, educated adult speakers of English (Romaine, 1984). Such varieties might include Korean-English, Spanish-English and, perhaps somewhat arguably, *English interlanguage*, the language used by nonnative English speakers in the process of acquiring English (Selinker, 1972, 1992).

Demographics

Continuous waves of immigrants have changed the educational, cultural, and linguistic makeup of California. Almost 40% of all immigrants to the United States in the 1980s ended up settling in California. Diverse groups of people—including rural and urban Mexicans, middle-class Taiwanese and Koreans, and Salvadoran refugees, as well as other groups such as the Vietnamese, Pacific Islanders, Iranians, Russians, and Afghans—have all come to California. From 1970 to 1980, the number of children who were classified as limited English proficient (LEP) in the state rose 254% (Crawford, 1995). By 1993, one out of every four California students was classified as LEP (Crawford, 1995). According to the 1995 California Language Census, the number of LEP students enrolled in the state's public schools continues to increase.[2] Over a million (1,282,982) public school children are considered LEP because their English is not sufficiently developed to participate on par with native English speakers in English-only classrooms (Macías, 1995). The children come from diverse non-English language backgrounds: About 78% are Spanish speakers, 4% are speakers of Vietnamese, 2% are speakers of Korean, 2% are speakers of Hmong, and 2% are speakers of Cantonese. There are also large numbers of students in California who speak Pilipino (Tagalog), Cambodian, and Farsi. The fastest growing language groups in California are Russian, Indonesian, Armenian, Urdu, and Mien (Yao). (See Macías, 1995, for detailed discussion.)

Because California's ESL students come from very diverse cultural backgrounds, they have varying values, beliefs, and traditions pertaining to education. Observations of their speech and writing reveal that they have acquired different levels of English proficiency in each of the four language skills areas—listening, speaking, reading and writing, and that they follow diverse patterns of acculturation. Some live in ethnically integrated areas where they hear a lot of English outside school, while others live in ethnic communities where they hear almost no English at all. Many others live in areas where they hear only nonstandard varieties of English.

The majority of immigrant students in California only attain the English needed for unskilled employment. Often those who do gain enough English proficiency to enter California's institutes of higher education have not acquired academic English language proficiency, even when they have completed their entire elementary and secondary educations in the United States. This is the case at the University of California, Irvine (UCI), where roughly 65% of the students are born outside of the United States and speak a first language other than English. In the academic year 1995-1996, approximately 300 students were required to take ESL courses. Despite the ESL students' many years in the United States (on average, about eight years), excellent high school grade point averages (above 3.5, in the upper 12% of their high school graduating classes), and high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (above 1000), their English language problems prevented them from achieving success in freshman writing courses, and they were required to take ESL courses to address their language difficulties.

The English Language Difficulties of UCI ESL Students

The essay in Appendix A exemplifies the type of writing that UCI ESL students produce during an hour-long entrance proficiency writing exam.

Vocabulary Difficulties

The vocabulary problems of UCI ESL students are serious. Despite years of education in the United States, their vocabularies are often extremely limited. Their writing is sometimes dotted with words that they have memorized for the verbal portion of the SAT. Note that in the writing sample in Appendix A, the student used words such as *ubiquitous, perspicacious* and *tumultuous*. Unfortunately, as indicated by Examples 1 and 2, UCI ESL students often use these "SAT" words incorrectly.

Example 1
She ate the *torrid* food quickly.

Example 2
He reach the *pungent* train.

In addition, they also use what are referred to as *acoustic approximations*. These are words and expressions that are picked up inaccu-

rately in conversations and used incorrectly. (See Examples 3 and 4.)

Example 3
Firstable, this essay talk about leaders.

Example 4
The book I read for my book report was *Catch Her in the Right.*

As indicated by Example 5 below, they sometimes use inappropriate words and expressions from conversational English in their academic writing.

Example 5
Mercy killing is a right way to decrease one's suffering if one is brain dead or could not covers from cancer. For example, *this guy* was on a machine like ten or thirteen years with no consciousness before he died.

In addition, they do not know the restrictions governing the use of words. (Refer to Example 6.)

Example 6
The clock *stood patiently* on the table.

Note that in Example 6, the student who produced the sentence seems to think that clocks, like people, are able to stand patiently. Students often have difficulty knowing when and how to use words metaphorically. They often know the most basic meaning of a word without understanding its alternate meanings. They are unable to use academically valued hypothesizing and synthesizing vocabulary such as doubt, infer, assert and conclude (Nippold, 1988) and instead use more general words such as think and say. They frequently confuse words that have similar sounds. One UCI student wrote an entire essay on *adversity*, which he confused with the word *diversity*, while another student wrote an entire essay on *perseverance*, which he confused with the word *preservation*. In addition, students have difficulty using word forms correctly. For instance, they sometimes turn nouns incorrectly into adjectives or adjectives incorrectly into verbs. Sentences such as *He afraided* instead of *He was afraid* occur repeatedly in their speech and writing.

None of this is surprising. A study by Zimmerman and Scarcella (1996) indicates that UCI ESL students know fewer than 50% of even such basic academic words as *magnitude, development*, and *summary*. In a test of academic words given to 192 UCI ESL students the students reported that they knew over 90% of the words tested. However, they were actually only able to use an average of 47% of the words in sentences. (See also Scarcella & Zimmerman, in press.)

Morphological and Sentence Structure Problems

In addition to vocabulary problems, UCI ESL students have serious difficulties with morphology and sentence structure. Articles are often used incorrectly (as in *The knowledge is good*). Noncount nouns are often used as count nouns (as in *The T.A. gave me many good advices*). Constructions with modal auxiliaries are often used incorrectly (as in *He can studies with me tonight*), and the students often rely on the verb *would* to indicate past tense to avoid having to use simple and irregular past tense forms that they do not know. Students frequently use the wrong verb tense (as in *Even today I still remembered when my mom died*), and sometimes only use one verb tense (usually present), because they do not know how to shift between tenses effectively. Causative structures are avoided or used incorrectly (as in *My mom got me make my bed*), and students have great difficulty using conditionals (*If I am you, I study engineering*), passive constructions (*The book written by Shakespeare*), and relative clauses (*Jay likes the girl who he married her*).

Other English Language Difficulties

The students also have rhetorical problems related to their inability to use English morphology; for instance, they have difficulty using pronouns to establish reference, using verb tense to frame events in narratives, and using language that is appropriate for the audiences for whom they are writing. Analyses of other aspects of their English language proficiency might well indicate other weaknesses.

Why do such bright, successful high school students enter UCI with such weak English language skills? To examine some of the reasons for the students' limited English proficiency, it will be useful to review the literature on L2 acquisition. Much of this research has been directly applied to teaching ESL children in public schools throughout the state of California. In the last 10 years, teachers seeking the language development specialist certificate were required to read it. More recently, students enrolled in teacher credential programs across California have been required to study this research in specially designed teacher credential programs.

Second Language Acquisition Research

The research advocates the following practices: (a) providing unstructured (i.e., not focused on form), comprehensible English input to learners in the context of meaningful, natural communication; (b) deemphasizing corrective feedback; and (c) limiting form-focused English language instruction. These principles are supported by theory-based research of the early 1980s.

Providing Unstructured, Comprehensible English Input

Research of the early 1980s—largely focusing on child first language learners, adult ESL international students, and foreign language learners—suggests that a sufficient quantity of unstructured, comprehensible English input tailored to the current English proficiency levels of ESL students aids their overall English language development. Krashen (1981, 1985) developed what he termed the comprehensible input hypothesis, suggesting that a level of English input appropriate for the students, one that is neither too difficult nor too easy, facilitates English language acquisition. In addition, he suggested that it is unnecessary to structure input for language development. His colleague, Terrell, explained:

> If the acquirer continues to receive sufficient comprehensible input and the affective conditions for acquisition are met, speech will continue to improve in fluency and correctness. Acquirers will slowly expand their lexicon and grammar, producing longer and longer phrases as they begin to acquire the rules of discourse and the broad range of skills we refer to as communicative competence. (1982, p. 121)

For Krashen, optimal classrooms for L2 development are places where rich input is provided. In his view, this input is, above all, comprehensible and focused on meaning rather than form. It is interesting and relevant to students and is not grammatically sequenced. It is sufficient in quantity and is not structured in such a way that it contains specific lexical items or grammatical structures. (For more recent discussions, refer to Krashen, 1989, 1993.)

While there have been many critiques of Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis (see, for example, Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Gregg, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987; and White, 1987), most pedagogues and researchers concede that the hypothesis "has powerful descriptive powers and captures the features of the second language acquisition process that teachers intuitively recognize as important" (Johnson, 1995, p. 83). In California it has been widely applied to classrooms across the state. ESL textbooks that are approved by the Department of Education advocate the hypothesis. Through credential programs and in-services, California teachers are taught that if they provide their students with meaning-oriented, natural, unstructured comprehensible English input, then their students' English skills will improve.

Despite its intuitive appeal to researchers and practitioners alike, there exist numerous problems when the comprehensible input hypothesis is applied to the ESL classroom. A major problem with the hypothesis concerns Krashen's notion of *unstructured* input. Because of previous theory-based but locally untested research on comprehensible input, California teachers were advised repeatedly not to structure deliberately the input that they provide their students. However, unstructured English did not necessarily expose students to academic English.

It might be useful here to clarify what I mean by academic English. I use this term to refer to the words, expressions, and grammatical structures that are used in academic settings. Although not everyone agrees on the particular vocabulary used in university settings and the boundaries between categories are fuzzy and tend to overlap, many researchers suggest that the following types of words characterize academic English:

- general words such as *come* and *busy* that are used across academic disciplines (as well as in everyday situations outside of university settings),

- technical words such as *stethoscope* and *arachnid* that are used in specific academic fields, and

- nontechnical, academic words such as *research* and *interpretation* that are used across academic fields.

Words may have specialized meanings in more than one field; for instance, they may be technical in some fields and metaphorical in others. Academic English also includes specific grammatical features such as passive constructions, relative clauses, and conditionals. These features occur relatively infrequently in casual conversation in comparison to their use in academic discourse.[3] (For a discussion of the features of academic English prose, see Biber, 1986, 1988.)

Recent research suggests that exposure to academic English input contributes to students' ability to acquire academic English; however, students are not regularly exposed to many of the features of this input through

casual conversations or pleasure reading. Contrary to what researchers have suggested, teachers may need to structure special activities to expose learners to specific forms of academic English input. (See, for instance, Celce-Murcia, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; and Swain, 1985, 1989.) Perhaps UCI ESL students were not exposed to academic English in their high schools; this might partly explain their difficulty using academic English appropriately in their writing.

However, even when teachers carefully structure classroom input to expose students to academic English, students may not acquire it; this is because, *structured or unstructured, comprehensible input alone does not ensure L2 acquisition.* (See for instance, Doughty, 1991; Long, 1988; and White, 1987.) Comprehensible input helps acquisition—and it may be essential to language development—but it does not guarantee acquisition. More specifically, the comprehensible input hypothesis does not explain the failure of UCI's students to acquire standard English. Between 1981 and 1995, thousands of UCI ESL students spent their entire childhoods in the United States and were exposed to countless hours of naturally occurring English input—through exposure to the media, their English-medium classrooms, and their extended interactions with the English-medium environment that surrounded them. They studied textbooks, memorized poetry, watched hours of television each day, and read comics, magazines, and novels. Some participated on debate teams and even served as valedictorians at their senior class graduations. Although we cannot assume that students were exposed to all the features of academic English, we can assume that the students were exposed to enough samples of standard English features such as definite articles (like *the*) and *wh*-questions (*who, what, where*) to acquire these very basic and frequently occurring features of standard English. We can assume that much of the English input that UCI students received represented the standard variety of English spoken by middle-class native English speakers. We can also assume that most of it was comprehensible. UCI students typically report that they understood what they read in their high school textbooks or heard in class. Yet for these students, exposure to comprehensible standard English input did not lead to the development of even such basic features of standard English as prepositions, articles, and verb tense.[4] Like the native English-speaking students who did not acquire nativelike French in the French immersion program studied by Swain (1985), UCI L2 students who had spent the majority of their lives in the United States did not acquire nativelike English. Like the students studied by Swain, their language was dotted by forms speakers of the standard variety of language would consider deviant. As Swain (1985) points out, "sim-

ply getting one's message across can and does occur with grammatically deviant forms. . ." (p. 248).

Perhaps one reason UCI L2 students failed to acquire standard English is that they prefer to use the variety of nonstandard English that they have acquired from valued peers in their ethnic communities. In a three-year longitudinal study, Scarcella (1996) found that Korean-American children who lived in a Korean-American ethnic community were exposed to large quantities of nonstandard English in their schools and in their churches. These children acquired the linguistic features of the nonstandard varieties of English spoken by admired peers—not the variety of English to which they were exposed when they watched American television, read English-language books, and listened to their English-speaking teachers.

Although UCI ESL students were exposed to thousands of hours of standard English, they report that they acquired nonstandard varieties of English from their nonnative English-speaking friends, often in school settings. They describe a variety of experiences using English in their high school classes. In some classes, where they primarily did seat work and had few opportunities to engage in peer-directed learning activities, they used English interlanguage when talking to their friends during lunch periods and breaks. In other classes, where their high school teachers exercised little control over the classroom, they sometimes spent the better part of their classroom periods listening to students shouting over their teacher. In these raucous classes, the students used English interlanguage to communicate, even when they were exposed to standard English in their textbooks. In yet other classes, students participated in academically valued, student-led classroom activities where they were encouraged to use their critical thinking abilities. In cooperative learning groups, they worked together on various projects and tasks—for instance, in social studies California History Day projects and in math Problems of the Week assignments. In these collaborative group learning situations, they used English interlanguage when interacting with their nonnative English-speaking classmates. Thus, most high school classrooms were not ideal places for UCI ESL students to acquire English because they put them in close, continuous contact with classmates whose variety of English deviated (as did their own) from the standard. By observing their classmates use such forms as *could goes* and *homeworks*, they may have learned that the forms that they themselves employed were also used by valued peers.

The importance of peers in language development has long been established. Stewart (1964) argued persuasively that children as young as nine are influenced by the language of their peers rather than the language of the school. Most of this research indicates that peer influence is strongest in

children ages nine to 18. Beebe (1985) summarized a complex hierarchy of input preferences and suggested that students "consciously or unconsciously choose to attend to some target language models rather than others" (Beebe, 1985, p. 404). Peer models and ethnic group models seem to be preferred by UCI students.

When Krashen first proposed the comprehensible input hypothesis in the early 1980s, the need to consider the varieties of English used in ethnic communities was simply not as great as it is today. Studies indicating that language classrooms could provide rich sources of comprehensible input for language development (such as those reported by Asher, 1972; Asher, Kusudo, & de la Torre, 1974; Edwards, Wesche, Krashen, Clement, & Krudeneier, 1984; Hammond, 1988; and Swaffer & Woodruff, 1978) did not examine California public schools in ethnic communities in the 1990s. These studies, widely cited by L2 pedagogues such as Richard-Amato (1996), Scarcella (1990) and others, mainly focused on input to adult language learners who were not surrounded by speakers of nonstandard varieties of English. In ethnic communities where children primarily interact with others who speak diverse varieties of English, teachers may need to specifically structure situations so that students are exposed to large quantities of standard English. They may also need to use this input in their own communication and attend to it. In brief, simply providing students with comprehensible English input, even when this input represents the standard variety, does not seem to guarantee standard English language development when students have already acquired a stabilized nonstandard variety of English.

Deemphasizing Corrective Feedback

Research of the early 1980s suggested that direct error correction did not lead to improved performance in an L2. Summarizing this research, Krashen (1981) suggested that students "improve in grammatical accuracy by obtaining more input, *not by error correction* [italics added]" (p. 64). He went on to suggest that error correction might be helpful to "some students" in some limited situations for some "easy-to-learn rules." Today's California teachers are taught to view errors as a necessary part of the developmental process of learning a second language. Additionally, they are often instructed that error correction should be kept to a minimum and be limited mainly to expansions of learner utterances. Writing teachers are frequently advised to focus on how effectively L2 learners convey their communicative intent rather than on mechanical and grammatical aspects of language such as subject-verb agreement or pronoun consistency. All this advice probably underestimates the linguistic ability of many secondary

ESL students as well as their strong cultural beliefs concerning the necessity of error correction (Celce-Murcia, 1991). For instance, in many Korean-American communities, teachers who do not correct student errors are considered inept. In these communities, there is a widespread belief that error correction helps students to improve their English language development (Chin & Scarcella, 1996). Errors are considered neither good nor bad but correctable. In a study of UCI student failure to acquire English, Earle-Carlin and Scarcella (1993) interviewed students about the corrective feedback they received prior to coming to UCI. Two students said:

• I want people correct me. Correcting show me my errors. But no teacher ever tell me what wrong with my English. They only tell me it very A+.

• No teacher correct my grammer. How can I learn? (p. 15)

UCI ESL students generally feel betrayed by their high school English teachers. "Why did my high school teachers give me all *A*s if my English is not good? I feel tricked," lamented one UCI student who was required to take ESL courses (Earle-Carlin and Scarcella, 1993, p. 13). Many UCI students report that their high school teachers allowed them to think that their English needed no improvement when it actually required a great deal. Perhaps teachers were tempted to raise the self-esteem of their ESL learners, leading students to believe that they had acquired perfect standard English— when, in fact, they had not.

Limiting Form-Focused English Language Instruction

Teachers are often admonished by researchers to limit the form-focused language instruction that they provide their students. In other words, they are typically told not to give "grammar lessons" and not to present rules about the English language. According to Krashen (1981), the best teachers put "grammar in its proper place." In his words,

Some adults, and very few children, are able to use conscious grammar rules to increase the grammatical accuracy of their output; and even for these people, very strict conditions need to be met before the conscious knowledge of grammar can be applied ... Children have very little capacity for conscious language learning and may also have little need for conscious learning, since they can come close to native speaker performance standards using acquisition alone." (p. 64)

There are several difficulties with this line of reasoning. First, without such instruction, many children in California fail to acquire even an informal variety of standard English, let alone academic English, and while it is probably true that children are not as adept at learning grammar rules as adolescents and adults, it probably is also the case that Krashen, who conducted research on this topic prior to the influx of immigrants in California's schools, underestimated the role of instruction in vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric in language teaching.

A second objection to the notion that English should not be instructed in California schools concerns the effectiveness of English instruction. There is now considerable evidence that form-focused language instruction significantly improves the UCI ESL students' ability to use grammatically correct sentences in their writing. Prior to enrolling in freshmen English courses, UCI ESL students are given form-focused ESL instruction related to specific grammatical features—including verb tenses, passive structures, relative clauses, and modal auxiliaries. Studies of the students' progress in learning these structures and using them in their writing indicate that these very bright students are highly capable of learning grammatical structures through instruction. Applied linguistics research of the early 1980s does not confirm this prediction. More recent research, however, does. (See, for instance, Doughty, 1991; Ellis, 1990; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1988, 1990; Pienemann, 1988; and Pienemann & Johnson, 1987.)

Teaching Practices

While it is true that budgetary cutbacks throughout the state of California undoubtedly served to undermine the English language instruction UCI ESL students received in secondary schools, it is also plausible that teaching practices in this state have contributed to UCI ESL students' failure to acquire academic English. Public school teachers may have unwittingly prevented UCI ESL students from acquiring English when they did not push them to communicate beyond their current English proficiency levels, provide them with valued sources of academic English, teach them to use this English, correct their language mistakes, and inform them of their actual progress acquiring English.

The pedagogical approaches discussed below—advocated by researchers such as Cummins (1989), Kagan (1986), Krashen (1993), Richard-Amato (1996), and Scarcella & Oxford (1993)—and enthusiastically supported by the California Department of Education were primarily based upon research of the early 1980s that did not consider the myriad of complex, constantly changing factors affecting the English language devel-

opment of California's immigrants of the 1990s. Such research was largely locally untested.

Cooperative Learning

One of the instructional approaches educators have adopted to stimulate English language development is cooperative learning. In cooperative learning,

> A teacher assigns small groups of students, often with different talents and needs, to work together on a project. Such an arrangement has benefits for a wide range of students, as documented by many studies. Students who need help on a task can often learn most easily from a peer who has mastered the task, and the 'masters' benefit cognitively and emotionally from organizing and explaining what they know. In discussing and defending their ideas with each other, students come to a more complex understanding than if they had worked on a problem alone. . . . Cooperative learning has particular benefits for students who are learning a second language. Accomplishing a cooperative task successfully requires students to engage in meaningful communication about the task at hand, which is the optimal context for language learning. (Kagan, 1986, p. 17)

Regrettably, I would argue that for many L2 students, cooperative learning is not the optimal context for learning academic English since engaging in meaningful communication about nonacademic tasks will not lead to the development of academic English. Further, it may not help students acquire standard English but may instead increase the amount of nonstandard English input valued peers give them, build their confidence in using nonstandard English, contribute to the stabilization of their own features of nonstandard English, and help them become fluent in nonstandard English.

Process Approaches

Even the highly praised process approaches to writing may fail students who are ready to acquire academic English. One difficulty with these approaches is that they are often misapplied in such a way that they give students the message that language forms are unimportant because the editing stage, in which language errors are corrected, is the last component of the writing process. However, it is this last component of the writing process which might be critically important to learners in ethnic communi-

ties, for this component may help them to notice the differences between standard English and their own English interlanguages. A second possible difficulty with process approaches to writing concerns the use of peer collaboration, when students brainstorm, revise and edit their writing in pairs and groups. Prewriting activities, including class discussions or brainstorming, may facilitate the writing process, but probably contribute little to the students' acquisition of standard English.[5] If L2 students are matched with other L2 students who have not acquired standard English, they may overlook such errors as *firstable* and *on another hand*. These error types may then become stabilized through consistent use and exposure during peer review and editing sessions. This happens because learners might regularly compare the language that they produce with perceived targets, in this case, their peers' interlanguages. Also, the students' peers might expose them to other nonstandard varieties of English, and when these varieties are in contact, stabilized group varieties sometimes emerge. (See, for instance, Trudgill, 1986.)

Sheltered English and Other Current Approaches

The simplified English often employed in sheltered English classes may also result in student failure to learn academic and standard English. Although these classes were not designed to teach advanced ESL learners, many school districts are offering advanced learners these sheltered English courses. If students are to develop proficiency in academic English, they must be exposed to reading materials that are authentic and academic; at some point, students must learn to read academic texts—essays, articles, and books—that have not been simplified for nonnative speakers.

Other approaches have been misapplied in ways that might also impair L2 development. For instance, misapplied whole language approaches might fail students who are trying to acquire academic English when teachers, misunderstanding these approaches, encourage their students to ignore language forms completely or promote an exclusive focus on the gist of texts. Once in academic settings, students need to know how to use language forms correctly. Understanding the gist of their texts is not enough.

In addition to these approaches, many of the activities presently encouraged in California schools may also undermine ESL students' acquisition of standard English. Journal writing and quickwrites (rapid writing activities in which students write about their own experiences and respond to prompts or source texts) are two such activities. When teachers encourage their students to keep daily, uncorrected personal journals and do not provide students with abundant opportunities to read, synthesize a large variety of standard English texts, and accurately express their opinions

about these texts in standard English, teachers may unwillingly be contributing to the stabilization of nonstandard English forms.

The use of quickwrites, in which students synthesize their own and others' ideas and opinions, can similarly undermine L2 development. Although these popular classroom activities provide students with large quantities of comprehensible standard English input through the medium of reading and promote writing fluency, they may not help students acquire standard English if teachers do not correct the student writing produced or if the learners' attention is not focused on the various ways in which meaning is expressed in texts and on the specific linguistic forms used in texts.[6] Thus teachers who use these techniques without providing corrective feedback risk promoting the use of nonstandard English features.

Other commonly used activities that might fail to help ESL students acquire standard English include such student-directed activities as debates and discussions of school-related issues in which students engage in extended talk with their peers. When students are deprived of the opportunity to interact with admired and respected native English-speaking peers, they do not receive the input they need to acquire nativelike English. Even when these interactive activities do provide students with exposure to standard English, they do not guarantee the acquisition of this English if students have already acquired from more valued peers a highly functional nonstandard variety of English that serves them well.

Conclusion

Researchers of the early 1980s strongly argued against interfering with English language development and urged teachers instead to provide students with unstructured comprehensible English input. It is time to reconsider this advice. I am not suggesting a return to monotonous drill-and-kill grammar exercises or teacher-centered grammar lectures; what I am advocating is a careful consideration of the English language needs of California students. What is needed now is a thorough analysis of the instruction which best facilitates the English language development of students at different English proficiency levels and ages, of diverse cultures and backgrounds, and of diverse schools and communities.

Despite the absence of such an analysis, the English difficulties of UCI ESL students suggest the need for different instructional practices than those that are often advocated in California schools. Getting secondary students in ethnic communities to acquire standard English might entail such interventionist practices as actively encouraging the use of standard English in student speech and writing (Scarcella & Oxford, 1990; Swain, 1985) and providing students with form-focused instruction and feedback. A number

of ESL methods and approaches presently being used to teach ESL students academic English—including content-based instruction, specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) , and cognitive academic language learning (CALLA)—might be promising. Specific teaching practices will need to be carefully developed to address local concerns for use with specific ESL and L2 populations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). All groups of learners may not need the same type of input, feedback, and form-focused instruction.

The English difficulties of UCI ESL students have strong implications for today's secondary classroom teachers. Not only do they suggest that a reconsideration of instructional practices is necessary, but they also suggest that student assessment should be rethought. ESL students should not be given the message that their English is either completely native or near-native, when, in fact, most speakers of standard English would consider such English substandard. UCI ESL students, most of whom came from ethnic communities, had average grades of As and Bs in their high school advanced placement English courses. These students deserved a more accurate assessment of their English from their high school teachers—not to penalize them, but to help them gain the skills that they needed to communicate effectively in an English-speaking society that, like it or not, in the 1990s does not promote those who have not acquired standard English. As Wong-Fillmore (personal communication, 1995) points out, there are now ESL lifers, life-long learners of ESL, who have failed to acquire English despite spending their entire lives in the United States. To level the academic playing field, ESL students in California high schools need increased exposure to academic English, form-focused instruction on how to use this English, corrective feedback provided in appropriate ways, and opportunities to use academic English in supportive environments throughout their educational careers. ■

Endnotes

1. Some of the ideas for this paper came from discussions with Lily Wong-Fillmore who reviewed UCI's ESL program in 1992 and was surprised by the large numbers of students enrolled in UCI courses who had received straight As in their high school honor English courses. I am very grateful for her input. Errors in content remain my own.

2. Between 1994 and 1995 the number increased by 3.9%.

3. While learning academic English causes difficulties for all university students, it may be especially critical to academic success. Knowledge of academic English is very important in reading. Because academic words occur frequently and tend to carry much of the meaning of academic textbooks (Coady, 1993; Na & Nation, 1985; Nation, 1990), these words help students to understand these books (Laufer, 1989, 1991; Na & Nation, 1985; Nation, 1990). A survey of 186 Midwestern ESL university students in credit English courses revealed that 70% perceived their "small vocabulary" to be their major weakness when reading English (Sheory & Mokhartari, 1993). Vocabulary problems prevent L2 readers from reading fluently and efficiently (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Jenkins & Dixon, 1983; Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

4. Krashen (1994) might argue that a socio-affective filter (consisting of affective variables) prevents English input from being processed by UCI ESL learners. If this is true, then thousands of UCI ESL learners have been prevented from acquiring academic English because of this filter.

5. Many UCI ESL students also tell their ESL instructors that they received no corrective feedback on their essays and that their grammar mistakes were always overlooked. This is not surprising given the large class sizes in California high schools, the difficulty teachers have correcting large numbers of student texts, and the many English teachers who have not been trained to teach L2 students and who may have little knowledge of English grammar themselves.

6. In addition, the learners' awareness of the ways in which they themselves might use these texts as examples for constructing their own meanings might need to be developed (Harklau, 1995).

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Appendix A

Sample Writing from ESL Proficiency Writing Exam

Is there someone in your life who is "just like family" to you, someone who you feel very close to or who you respect a lot? When I saw this topic question, all I could think of was my best friend christine. We haven't known each other so good, and became very close friends.

When I think of christine, I see her sweetest smile that no one else can ever have. She is the perspicacious person who know how I feel in almost any situations. Sometimes, it even scares me because of the fact that someone knows me too well. But when I am with her, I can be myself. I don't have to hide my feeling. Because she empathetic, she already knowing my feeling. Christine is like sister I've never have. She care too much and helps me in many ways.

I still remembered my first car accident in my heart. It was the tumultuous day when I told christine to come with me to one of my friends' house. Firstable she told me she was busy but we ended up going together. It was a remote house I've never went before. So I didn't want to go alone. When christine heared that, she mention about she'll be glad to come with me. Unfortunately, I ran through a red light, and I hitted car. I was so scared that christine got hurt bad. I seriously couldn't say anything because it was all my fault.

I was afraid that christine'll blame me for every thing. But she was different. I've never seen her so calmly in my life. Christine ask me how I was and started to talking to the police. And she basically took care of matter, while I was in state of shock. Even after that accident, she was the one to ask me how I was feeling and tried to take care of me. According to the author Karen Lindsay, she write, "And the truth hidden by the myth is that people have always created larger family. . ." I definitely agree with her. Christine is ubiquitous part of my life just like my biological family is to me. And I want to keep this relationships all through my life.