The Interface Hypothesis Revisited

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The Interface Hypothesis addresses the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language (L2) (N. Ellis, 1994). It claims that these two types of knowledge are distinct but that knowledge originates in its explicit form and subsequently transforms into implicit knowledge. While there is broad acceptance of the separateness of explicit and implicit knowledge, theories of L2 acquisition vary as to whether they accept an interface and, if they do, what the nature of the interface is. Paradis (2009) claims that the neurological distinctiveness of the two types of knowledge precludes the possibility of a direct interface in L2 learning. DeKeyser (1998) draws on skill-acquisition theory to argue that for adult L2 learners knowledge originates in a declarative form and develops into a procedural, implicit form through practice. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) draw on sociocultural theory to make a similar claim, arguing that it is essential that instruction equips learners with a clear conceptual understanding of the linguistic properties of the L2. N. Ellis (2005) proposes that the interface is indirect, with explicit knowledge helping to fine-tune the cognitive processes responsible for the development of implicit knowledge. These different positions have major implications for language pedagogy. A non-interface position supports approaches, such as task-based teaching, that cater to incidental L2 learning. A strong interface position supports traditional approaches to language teaching (e.g., present-practice-produce) and also systemic-theoretical instruction (Gal’perin, 1979). A weak interface hypothesis supports an approach that decouples explicit and implicit instruction and proposes that the emphasis given to each needs to vary to take account of the learners’ age and developmental stage. To date, it has not been possible to test the Interface Hypothesis empirically because distinct measures of the two types of knowledge have been lacking. This talk concludes by examining ways of overcoming this problem and proposing a methodology for testing the hypothesis.

The Teacher’s Codeswitching and the Learner’s Strategic Response:
Towards a Research Agenda and Implications for Teacher Education

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Whether the first language (L1) of the learners should be used in foreign language (L2) classrooms stretches back over a hundred years. Proponents of the Direct Method and, in the 1980/90s researchers who focused strongly on input and interaction as vehicles for L2 learning, at best ignored the role of the L1 and at worst considered it detrimental to learning even though prominent theorists (e.g. Widdowson, 1978; 2003) never appeared to exclude it from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) classrooms.

Nevertheless the L1 undoubtedly contributes to the inherent tensions in CLT in that CLT is an approach which rests largely on communication of meaning through the L2. A possible reconciliation of this tension comes through associating naturalistic codeswitching (CS) with classroom CS whereby communication of meaning can be achieved through two or more languages as long as the teacher is a bilingual. However, an optimal balance between L1 and L2