An integrated encoding-decoding model of SLA

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Traditionally, comprehension and production processes have been studied separately, based on the assumption that they take place in two separate systems and/or rely on different types of processing operations. This ‘two-systems approach’ of processing has recently been challenged by proponents of a more integrated view of the processes underlying comprehension and production (see Gambi & Pickering 2018). A key question in SLA research is whether L2 comprehension and production are indeed based on separate mechanisms or whether they are to some extent intertwined. In this paper, I propose an integrated encoding-decoding model of SLA and present evidence from a study of the L2 acquisition of the English passive (Lenzing 2017).

The model combines aspects of Processability Theory (Pienemann & Lenzing 2015) with the notion of a Shared Grammatical Workspace (Kempen et al. 2012). It assumes the existence of one L2 syntactic processor underlying both grammatical encoding and decoding. I hypothesise that in both encoding and decoding processes, recourse is made to the same processing procedures.

I present data from 59 learners of L2 English with German as L1 at different stages of L2 acquisition. The data were obtained in two related cross-sectional studies focusing on the oral production and comprehension of the passive in relation to each learner’s stage of acquisition. The production data were collected using communicative tasks and film clips. The comprehension data were elicited using an enactment task, a sentence-picture matching task and a sentence-matching reaction time experiment.

I analysed the data for a) the individual learners’ developmental stages, b) the learners’ production and comprehension of the passive and c) differences in reaction times. The results of the study indicate areas of shared resources between comprehension and production processes and suggest that in both modalities syntactic processing is governed by the constraints of the same developmental stage.
References:


