Influence of input on immediate production

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Introduction

This paper highlights an aspect of the relationship between input and output in a foreign language classroom. Although input is a great source of influence on learners' production, little research has been made on the relationship between input that is not used as feedback and learners' immediate production. We investigate this particular kind of relationship and attempt to describe the influence of the input on the output.

In this small-scale study, written narratives have been the target of investigation where tense and aspect markings by the students are related to the written input. The students are all native Swedish, learning French as a foreign language.

Previous studies

Input

The influence that input has on learner output is a well explored area and includes research on, for instance, frequency in input (e.g. Swain 1991, Klein, Dietrich & Noyau 1995, Flyman Mattsson 2003), rate of speech (Hatch 1983, Kelch 1985), and input enhancement (Sharwood Smith 1993). Several studies have investigated the relationship between feedback and immediate production by the learners where it is found that they often produce more targetlike output in response to feedback from their interlocutors (e.g. Lyster & Ranta 1997, Oliver 1995). Even in interactions between non-native speakers, they do not take each other's errors into the immediate production and usually do not make corrections to utterances that are already correct (Porter 1986, Pica et al. 1996).

Narratives

In narratives, the temporal conditions constitute an important part in the establishing of narrative coherence. Apart from adverbials as temporal markers, tense is also used to arrange the events into the order that they took place. Much research on narratives has focused on discourse grounding, which is the division into foreground and background. The foreground consists of events and changes in the situation and "is composed of sentences which refer to sequenced points on a timeline" (Dry 1983:48), while the background information gives a description of the context and explains and interprets the text. It "is composed of those sentences that either do not refer to a single point (e.g. imperfectives, habituals, iteratives), or refer to a point that is not presented in *fabula* sequence (e.g. sentences with past perfect tense)" (Dry 1983:48). In many languages this information is given at the beginning and the end of a story, but also occasionally in the middle when something needs to be described for the continued understanding.

The research on written narratives is not as rich as that on oral narratives, especially for French as the target language. In oral native French narratives, the foreground is either given in *présent* or in *passé composé*, and the background in *présent, imparfait* or *plus-que-parfait* (Weinrich 1994). Bardovi-Harlig 2000:291, however, points out that the level of proficiency is a factor that determines the distribution of verbal morphology relative to grounding, where low-level learners show no systematic use of tense and intermediate learners have been found to use *passé composé* in the foreground and base forms in the background (Véronique 1987). Flyman Mattsson 2003 showed that a group of upper secondary school students, the control group for the present study, were able to systematically contrast verb forms in order to change the temporal perspective in oral narratives, and that it is the alternation of verb forms that indicates grounding rather than the verb form itself.

This same group has also shown that they are able to specify the rules for when to use *passé composé* and *imparfait*, where the most frequently cited rule for *passé composé* was "sudden event" (Flyman Mattsson 2003:189).

As for written narratives, Weinrich (see Luscher 1998) differs between *monde commenté*, which is written in *présent* and *passé composé*, and *monde raconté*, where *imparfait* describes the background and *passé simple* the foreground. The present study involves the latter, although it cannot be expected that learners at this level use *passé simple* (see Flyman Mattsson 2003).

The data

In order to investigate the relationship between input and learners' immediate production, this study is made on written narratives preceded by written input. In the study by Flyman Mattsson 2003 of an equivalent group of students, oral narratives without any preceding input showed that the students were able to systematically contrast verb forms in order to change the temporal perspective. Since the targeted verb form, that is, the verb form given in the input (*imparfait*), plays the same role as background in both oral and written narratives (Weinrich 1994, Luscher 1998), this group of students will be our control group. The foreground, on the other hand, presents a difference in oral and written narratives as *passé simple* is used in the latter. The students in the present study, however, have not yet reached the proficiency level where they use *passé simple* in texts, which means that they use *passé composé* in written as well as in oral discourse.

The written data is collected from 22 students in upper secondary school with about four years of French studies. The students were asked to write a story about the rescue of a cat in a tree. The beginning they were given was the following:

> *C'était un beau dimanche d'été et sur le balcon de la maison des Dupont un petit chat dormait tranquillement. Tout d'un coup trois chiens ...*

> It was a beautiful Sunday in the summer and on the balcony at Duponts' house a small cat slept peacefully. Suddenly three dogs ...

The input given to the students consists of a background described in *imparfait*. The part of the story where the students are supposed to take over is where the foreground events begin. The purpose of this task was to find out if the use of *imparfait* would spread to the foreground as well, thus being influenced by the input, or if the students would make use of verb form alternation to indicate grounding.

Results

Given that the students in the control group in most cases were systematically able to contrast verb forms in order to change the temporal perspective, that is, they were able to indicate grounding through alternation of verb forms, the students in the present study were expected to be able to do the same in written narratives. In the present study, the students were given background information in *imparfait* followed by an indication that the foreground was about to start (*tout d'un coup*).

Table 1. Verb forms by the control group (Flyman Mattsson 2003:147)

Stud.	1st narrative Backg.	Foreg.	2nd narrative Backg.	Foreg.
1	prés	prés	prés	prés
2	prés	mix	prés	prés
3	imp	prés	imp	prés
4	imp	prés	prés	prés
5	imp	mix	imp	prés
6	prés	prés	prés	prés
7	prés	prés	prés	prés
8	mix	prés	mix	mix
9	imp	prés	prés	prés
10	prés	PC	prés	PC

We will begin by looking at the verb-forms in the background and the foreground used by the control group. Ten students told two narratives each (Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, several of the narratives were told entirely in *présent* while others had different verb forms in the foreground and background. One such alternation was between *imparfait* in the background and *présent* in the foreground, which is in agreement with previous studies (Weinrich 1994). *Imparfait* is not used to report on the foreground in any case.

We will now turn to the written narratives in this study where the background at the beginning of the narrative is already given in *imparfait*. These are accounted for in Table 2. Several of the students give additional background later in the narrative.

As we can see from Table 2, there is an important difference between the foreground in the narratives preceded by input and the narratives without input. Although *présent* is a common verb form in the foreground here as well, in five of the narratives the foreground is described in *imparfait*, which is never the case in the control group. Example (1) shows an extract from a

Table 2. Verb forms in narratives preceded by written input

Stud.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Backg.	–	imp	–	–	imp	mix	prés	prés	prés	prés	–
Foreg.	imp	mix	imp	prés	prés	mix	mix	prés	prés	prés	imp

Stud.	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Backg.	imp	imp	mix	prés	imp	prés	prés	imp	prés	mix	prés
Foreg.	imp	mix	PC	prés	imp	prés	prés	prés	prés	mix	prés

narrative where the student consistently uses *imparfait* to tell the story. There are also five narratives where the foreground is described with mixed verb forms. As opposed to the control group where the foreground with mixed verb forms consists of *présent* and *passé composé* (Flyman Mattsson 2003:145), the mixed verb forms in the foreground here include *présent* and *passé composé* as well as *imparfait*. An example of such a mixture is shown in (2) where *présent* is typically used in direct speech. *Imparfait* is thus a fairly common foreground verb form in the present narratives, while it only describes the background in the control group.

(1) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **allaient** vers la maison des Duponts. La chatte se **reveillait** tout à coup et **courait** vers la porte de la maison. Elle **entrait** la maison et monsieur Dupont lui **criait**: "Qu'est–ce que tu fais?"…*

Suddenly three dogs went towards Duponts' house. The cat woke up suddenly and ran towards the door of the house. She came into the house and mister Dupont shouted at her: "What are you doing?"

(2) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **ont mordu** le qeue de le chat. Le chat **a pris** ses botes et son épée. Je m'apelle le maitre chat il **a crie** et il **perforait** un des chiens avec son épée mais les autre deux le **chassaient** avec ses grandes bouches terribles.*

Suddenly three dogs bit the cat's tail. The cat took his boots and his sword. My name is the master cat he shouts/ed and he pierced one of the dogs with his sword but the other two chased him with their big terrible mouths.

As for the background, the narratives follow more the pattern of the control group, where all backgrounds were given in *présent* or *imparfait* (Flyman Mattsson 2003:142). In several of the narratives where additional background is given, the background is entirely or partly presented in *imparfait*. In some of the narratives, however, the students change the original background verb-form, *imparfait*, to use *présent* instead. As the foreground has already started by the written input, the learner backgrounds are never immediately following the input background, which makes a verb form alternation in the background a little less unnatural. In example (3), in spite of the introducing background in *imparfait*, the rest of the narrative is presented in *présent*, which includes both background and foreground.

(3) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **viennent** dans la jardin. Le chat se revaie et il **a** très peur. Il ne **sais** pas ce qu'il fera. Il **commence** jama et les chiens le **voient** et ils **commencent** voffa sous le balcon. Maintenant le chat ne **peux** pas rester sur le balcon. Soudain il hoppar à l'abre qui **est** dehors du balcon. Là il **faut** rester tout le jour.* •

Suddenly three dogs come into the garden. The cat wakes up [?] and he is very scared. He doesn't know what to do. He starts to miaow and the dogs see him and they start to bark under the balcony. Now the cat cannot stay on the balcony. Suddenly he jumps to the tree that is outside the balcony. There he has to stay all day.

So far we have established that the foreground differs from that of the control group in that several of the narratives were told in *imparfait* and that the background is described in *présent* and *imparfait* as is the case in the control group. We will now look at a few of the narratives in detail.

(4) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **apprendaient**. Le chat **continue** avec le dormirment. Les chiens **barquent** et le chat se revenu. Le chat **regardait** les chiens. Ils **étaient** très dangereux et ils **approchaient** le chat très rapidement. Quand les chiens **a** d'avantage de dix metres a le chat, il **criait** miaux et le chat **fait** un grand hop par le balcon à une arbre très close. En étaient la les chiens **a perdu** des chances a continuent de **poursuivre** le chat et ils **avaient** seulement de continuent avec ses barquement par le balcon ...*

Suddenly three dogs approached [?]. The cat continues with his sleeping. The dogs bark [?] and the cat wakes up [?]. The cat looked at the dogs. They were very dangerous and they approached the cat very quickly. When the dogs has advantage of ten meters to the cat, he screamed miaow and the cat makes a big jump [?] from the balcony to a tree very close [?]. When they were there the dogs has lost chances to continue to follow the cat and they had only to continue with his barking [?] from the balcony...

In example (4), the student uses a mixture of *imparfait*, *présent* and *passé composé* with seemingly no underlying structure. The foreground starts with *imparfait* (*apprendaient*) and is followed by *présent* (*continue*). This student obviously has some difficulties with verb forms, which is further shown by forms like *se revenu, en étaient, a continuent, de continuent*. An interesting detail in this narrative, however, is that the verb immediately following the background presented in *imparfait* is, in fact, in *imparfait*. This may be a coincidence, we will therefore take a look at some other examples. In example (5), which is also a narrative presented with different verb forms, the student once again starts with an *imparfait* (*arrivaient*), which in this case is

followed by a *passé composé* (*ont vu*). Both are describing the foreground so the student is not unfamiliar with using *passé composé* in relation to foreground. Irrespective of what verb forms the narratives are written in, several of the students begin their stories, and thus the foreground, with a verb in *imparfait*. This gives further support to the influence of immediately preceding input, as the use of *imparfait* in the foreground does not exist in the control group. Example (6) is a narrative entirely written in *présent* except for the first verb, which is in *imparfait* (*allaient*).

(5) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **arrivaient** et ils **ont vu** le chat. Ils **courissent** à le chat mais le chat **disparêtait** à l'arbre ...*

Suddenly three dogs came and they saw the cat. They run [?] to the cat but the cat disappeared in the tree ...

(6) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **allaient** devant le chat. Le chat **se reveille** et **couris** vers un arbre. Les trois chiens **découvrent** le chat et le **courissent** après. Mais le chat **vois** son sauvetage: un grand arbre sur la rue. Le chat **traverse** la rue avec les trois chiens d'après et une voiture **vient!** Mais la voiture **s'arrète** en temps et le chat et sauvait. Mais en l'arbre le chat **tombe** et mors. Les chiens **sont** heureux, ils **peuvent mangent** le chat.*

Suddenly three dogs came in front of the cat. The cat wakes up and runs [?] towards a tree. The three dogs discover the cat and run [?] after him. But the cat sees his rescue: a big tree in the street. The cat crosses the street with the three dogs after and a car comes! But the car stops in time and the cat is [?] saved. But in the tree the cat falls and dies [?]. The dogs are happy, they can eat the cat.

In contrast with the narratives illustrated above, there are a few narratives with the first verb in *passé composé*, see examples (7) and (8). These, however, are not followed up with additional verbs in this form, but continue instead in *imparfait*, even though the foreground continues.

(7) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens **sont arrivés** et ils **avaient** peur. Derriére les chiens, dix grands chats les **poursuivaient**. Alors le chat qui **dormait se reveillait** et il **était** heureux ...*

Suddenly three dogs came and they were scared. Behind the dogs, ten big cats followed them. Then the cat who slept woke up and he was happy ...

(8) *Tout d'un coup trois chiens* **sont allés**. *Ils* **étaient** *sous le balcon et* **voyaient** *sur le chat. Le chat se reveille et* **parlait** *avec les chiens …*

Suddenly three dogs came. They were under the balcony and looked at [?] the cat. The cat wakes up and talked with the dogs …

Discussion

The results show some important differences between the oral narratives without any preceding input by the control group (Flyman Mattsson 2003) and the written narratives in the present study where input was given as an initial background in *imparfait*. A previous study has shown that the students in the control group were able to systematically contrast verb forms in order to change the temporal perspective. The purpose of the present study was therefore to find out if the students would make use of verb form alternation in the same way or if they would be influenced by the immediately preceding input and overuse forms of *imparfait*.

The description of additional background did not give rise to much difference between the two groups; they were presented in either *présent* or *imparfait*. It was rather the foreground that presented the major differences. The control group varied between *présent* and *passé composé*, which is also in line with previous studies. The students in the present study, on the other hand, used a great deal of *imparfait* to carry the story forward, a verb form never used for this purpose by the control group. Since the input consisted of verbs in *imparfait* and this input was not available for the control group, it is likely that it is the input that influences the production of the students. This is further supported by the examples which showed that the verb immediately following the input often were presented in *imparfait*.

In Flyman Mattsson 2003:189, it was shown that an equivalent group of students gave 'sudden event' as the most common rule for when to use *passé composé*. In the present study, the students were given a background followed by *tout d'un coup* 'suddenly' which clearly introduce a sudden event. One would therefore expect many more *passé composé* in the foreground. A few of the students in fact do give the first verb in *passé composé*, but as these usually are followed by verbs in *imparfait* in the foreground, there is still a possible influence from the input.

These results suggest that even if the students are able to produce correct verb forms in relation to temporal perspective, the immediately preceding input is a strong factor of influence and may induce incorrect forms. This implies that the students are not very secure in their language use and choose to rely on the input instead of their own proficiency. Self-confidence has been

discussed in the literature as an influential factor on classroom learners (see e.g. Lindberg 1996, Flyman Mattsson 2003) and the present study gives further support for this. More research is needed on the influence of self-confidence on language acquisition along with discussions about pedagogical solutions.

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Verb serialization in Kammu

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1 Background

1.1 Kammu – general properties

Kammu is spoken by approximately 500,000 people primarily in northern Laos, northern Thailand, and northwestern Vietnam. It belongs to the Khmuic branch of Mon-Khmer languages. It is an isolating language, with no inflectional morphology and little derivational morphology (basically causatives and nominalizations). Word order is SVO, NA, NG and prepositional. Kammu *wh*-questions are formed by means of *wh-* in situ. Anaphoric relations can reach across clause boundaries: an anaphor in an embedded clause can be bound by the matrix subject. Some relevant examples are given in (1).

1 a. yòŋ ò   cú   pə̀   màh rùŋ
      father 1s want eat rice steam
      'My father wants to eat steamed rice.'

   b. mèe kùuñ mə̀?
      2sm see   who?
      'Who did you see?'

   c. kə̀ə wèc tàa kàaŋ tèe
      3sm return LOC home REFL
      'He returned to his home.'

   d. ò   wèet tráak nám
      1s   buy   buffalo big
      'I bought a big buffalo.'