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### Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition

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# RESEARCH ON THE ACCULTURATION MODEL FOR SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** This paper presents a model of second language acquisition based on the social-psychology of acculturation. The model maintains that certain social and psychological variables cluster into a single variable, acculturation. The model predicts that learners will acquire the target language to the degree they acculturate to the target language group. Six studies that, in various, ways seek to test the Acculturation Model are reviewed and evaluated. Technical problems that affect such research are discussed, and the current status of the model is assessed.

## Acculturation Factors<sup>2</sup>

This paper presents a model of second-language acquisition based on the social-psychology of acculturation and also presents the results of research conducted to test the model. From the taxonomy in Table 1, I would like to argue that two groups of variables — social factors and affective factors — cluster into a single variable which is a major causal variable in SLA. I propose that we call this variable acculturation. By acculturation I mean the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language (TL) group. I also propose that any learner can be placed on a continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity with speakers of the TL, and that the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between two types of acculturation. In type one acculturation, the learner is socially integrated with the TL group and, as a result, develops sufficient contacts with TL speakers to enable him to acquire the TL. In addition, he is psychologically open to the TL such that input to which he is exposed becomes intake. Type two acculturation has all the

**Table 1** Taxonomy of factors influencing second-language acquisition

<i>Social Factors:</i>	Dominance; Nondominance; Subordination; Assimilation; Acculturation; Preservation; Enclosure; Cohesiveness; Size; Congruence; Attitude; Intended Length of Residence in TL Area.
<i>Affective Factors:</i>	Language Shock; Culture Shock; Motivation; Ego-permeability.
<i>Personality Factors:</i>	Tolerance for Ambiguity; Sensitivity to Rejection; Introversion/Extroversion; Self-esteem.
<i>Cognitive Factors:</i>	Cognitive Development; Cognitive Processes: imitation, analogy, generalisation, rote memorisation; Cognitive Style: field dependence, category width, cognitive interference, monitoring.
<i>Biological Factors:</i>	Lateralisation; Transfer; Infrasystems.
<i>Aptitude Factors:</i>	Modern Language Aptitude; IQ; Strephosymbolia.
<i>Personal Factors:</i>	Nesting Patterns; Transition Anxiety; Reaction to Teaching Methods; Choice of Learning Strategies.
<i>Input Factors:</i>	Frequency; Salience; Complexity; Type of Interlocutor.
<i>Instructional Factors:</i>	Goals; Teacher; Method; Text; Duration; Intensity.

characteristics of type one, but in this case the learner regards the TL speakers as a reference group whose life style and values he consciously or unconsciously desires to adopt. Both types of acculturation are sufficient to cause acquisition of the TL, but the distinction is made in order to stress that social and psychological contact with the TL group is the essential component in acculturation (as it relates to SLA) and that adoption of the life style and values of the TL group (characteristics traditionally associated with the notion of acculturation) is not necessary for successful acquisition of the TL.

### Social Variables

When we examine social variables (Schumann, 1976a, b, 1978a, b) involved in acculturation and thus SLA, we are concerned with variables which involve the relationship between two social groups who are in a contact situation, but who speak different languages. One group is considered the second-language learning (2LL) group and the other the target language (TL) group. Certain social factors can either promote or inhibit contact between the two groups and thus affect the degree to which the 2LL group acculturates, which in turn affects the degree to which that group will acquire the target language.

The first such factor involves social dominance patterns. If the 2LL group is politically, culturally, technically or economically superior (dominant) to

the TL group then it will tend not to learn the target language. For example, French colonists in Tunisia were potential learners of Arabic. But the French, as a group, because of their political, cultural, technical and economic dominance, were socially distant from the Tunisians and felt very little need to acquire Arabic. If the 2LL group is inferior (subordinate) to the TL group then there will also be social distance between the two groups, and the 2LL group will tend to resist learning the target language. For example, American Indians living in the Southwest have traditionally been subordinate to the dominant Anglo group and have also resisted acculturation and the acquisition of English. This situation is compounded by issues of enclosure, congruence and attitude which will be mentioned below. If the 2LL group and the TL group are roughly equal in terms of political, cultural, technical and economic status, then contact between the two groups is likely to be more extensive and the acquisition of the target language by the 2LL group will be enhanced.

The second social factor affecting second language learning involves three integration strategies: assimilation, preservation and adaptation. (Schumann (1976a, b, 1978a, b) used the term acculturation instead of adaptation. However, in this paper adaptation is used to refer to the integration strategy and acculturation is used in the broader sense to refer to social and psychological contact with speakers of the TL.) If the 2LL group assimilates then it gives up its own life style and values and adopts those of the target language group. This strategy maximises contact between the two groups and enhances acquisition of the target language. If the 2LL group chooses preservation as its integration strategy then it maintains its own life style and values and rejects those of the TL group. This situation creates social distance between the two groups and makes it unlikely that the 2LL group will acquire the TL group's language. If the 2LL group chooses adaptation as its integration strategy then it adapts to the life style and values of the TL group, but maintains its own life style and values for intragroup use. This particular integration strategy yields varying degrees of contact between the two groups and thus varying degrees of acquisition of the target language.

Enclosure is the third social factor that affects second language learning. Enclosure refers to the degree to which the 2LL group and the TL group share the same churches, schools, clubs, recreational facilities, crafts, professions and trades. If the two groups share these social constructs then enclosure is said to be low, contact between the two groups is enhanced and acquisition of the target language by the 2LL group is facilitated. However, if the two groups have different churches, schools, clubs, recreational facilities, crafts, professions and trades then enclosure is said to be high, contact between the two groups is limited and opportunities for acquisition of the target language are reduced.

Cohesiveness and size are related social factors that also affect second-language learning. If the 2LL group is cohesive, then its members will tend to remain separate from the TL group, and if the 2LL group is large, the

intragroup contact will be more frequent than intergroup contact. Both these situations will reduce the opportunities for acquisition of the target language.

Congruence or similarity between the culture of the TL group and that of the 2LL group also affects the degree of contact between the two groups. If the two cultures are similar then social contact is potentially more likely and second-language learning may be facilitated.

Attitude is another important social factor involved in second-language learning. If the 2LL group and the TL group have positive attitudes toward each other, second-language learning is more likely to occur than if they view each other negatively.

The final social factor to be considered is the 2LL group's intended length of residence in the target language area. If the 2LL group intends to remain for a long time in the target language area, it is likely to develop more extensive contacts with the TL group. Therefore, an intended lengthy residence in the target language area would tend to promote second-language learning.

### Affective Variables

When discussing social variables we are concerned with language learning by groups of people. However, affective variables (Schumann, 1975, 1976b, 1978a, b) relate to language learning by individuals. An individual may learn under social conditions which are not favourable for SLA and may not learn under social conditions which appear to be favourable. The psychological variables influencing acculturation and hence SLA are affective in nature and include language shock, cultural shock, motivation and ego permeability.

#### *Language Shock*

In discussing what can be called language shock, Stengal (1939) points out that when learners attempt to speak a second language they often fear that they will appear comic. He compares the use of a second language with wearing fancy clothes. The adult learner may want to wear his fancy clothes, but he also fears criticism and ridicule. The child, however, sees language as a method of play and finds communication a source of pleasure. Thus, he doesn't fear his fancy clothes; he enjoys wearing them. Stengal states, 'the adult will learn the new language the more easily, the more of these infantile characteristics he has preserved.' He also points out that adults speaking a second language are often haunted by doubts as to whether their words actually reflect their ideas. Children, he says, are less worried about this. The child is willing to use a word incorrectly and to form new words if necessary. Finally, learners often get a good deal of narcissistic gratification from their use of their native language, and in many cases, they use language to attract attention and praise. When speaking a second language in which they are much less proficient, they lose an important source of narcissistic gratification.

*Cultural shock*

Cultural shock can be defined as anxiety resulting from the disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture. When moving into a new culture, the learner finds himself in a dependent state. The coping and problem-solving mechanisms that he has at his disposal often do not work. As a result, activities which were routine in his native country require a great deal of energy in the new environment. This situation can cause disorientation, stress, anxiety and fear. The resulting mental state can produce a powerful syndrome of rejection which diverts energy and attention from second-language learning. The learner, in attempting to find a cause for his disorientation, may reject himself, his own culture, the organisation for which he is working and the people of the host country. Under such conditions the learner is unlikely to make the effort necessary to become bilingual.

*Motivation*

Motivation, the third affective factor, involves the learner's reasons for attempting to acquire the second language. Researchers (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) have identified two motivational orientations for second-language learning — an integrative motivation and an instrumental motivation. An integratively-oriented learner wants to learn the second language in order to meet with, talk to, find out about and, perhaps, become like speakers of the target language whom he both values and admires. An instrumentally-oriented learner is one who has little interest in the people who speak the target language, but wants to learn the language for more utilitarian reasons, such as getting ahead in his occupation or gaining recognition from his own membership group. It has generally been thought that integrative motivation is the more powerful of the two because it implies a desire to integrate with speakers of the target language. A learner with an instrumental motivation would be expected to integrate, and hence acquire the second language, only to the point where his instrumental goals were satisfied. If the learner merely wanted to be able to buy food and take public transportation, he could achieve these goals with a very low level of proficiency in the second language. If the learner had to use the target language in his professional life then his level of learning would be much higher.

Recent research, however, seems to indicate that the motivational orientation that is associated with proficiency in the second language seems to vary according to setting. An integrative motivation appears to be more effective in settings where it is neither necessary nor an accepted fact of life that the second language be acquired. Such conditions obtain in the United States with regard to learning languages such as French, German or Italian. On the other hand, in settings such as Saudi Arabia there may be no integrative motivation to acquire English, but a great deal of instrumental motivation in order to deal with English speaking technical advisors, educators and businessmen. Oller, Baca & Vigil (1977) have even found that with colonised

populations such as Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, proficiency in the second language (in this case English) is associated with an anti-integrative motivation. So, while instrumental and integrative motivations are useful ways to think about success in second-language learning, they are complex constructs that interact both with the social variables discussed earlier and the other variables listed in Table 1.

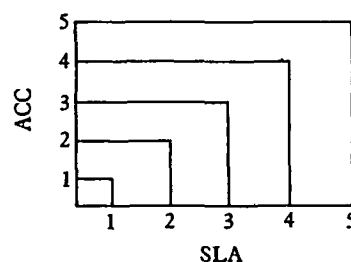
#### *Ego-Permeability*

Guiora (1972), in attempting to explain the ability of some people to acquire native-like pronunciation in a second language, developed the notion of 'language ego'. He sees language ego as parallel to the Freudian construct, body ego. In the course of general ego development the child acquires body ego by which he becomes aware of the limits of his physical being and learns to distinguish himself from the object world around him. In a similar fashion, in the course of general ego development, the child acquires a sense of the boundaries of his language. The sounds, words, syntax and morphology of his language become objectified and develop firm outlines and boundaries. In the early stages of development, language ego boundaries are permeable, but later they become fixed and rigid. Guiora believes that ego-permeability can be induced by lowering the learner's level of inhibition. Thus successful SLA may depend on the learner's level of disinhibition and thus openness to TL language input.

In sum, if language shock and cultural shock are not overcome and if the learner does not have sufficient and appropriate motivation and ego-permeability, then he will not fully acculturate and hence will not acquire the second language fully.

#### **SLA and Acculturation**

This discussion of social and affective factors leads to the major hypothesis of this paper which is that SLA is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the TL group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language. An idealised schema of this relationship is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**

This Figure indicates that for each degree of acculturation there is an equal degree of SLA. The real situation is certainly not so neat; there is probably no one-to-one relationship between acculturation and SLA.

My more recent thinking concerning the nature of acculturation, as a causal variable in SLA and the role of interaction and input in that process leads me to suggest that there may be a chain of causality in natural SLA that perhaps operates in the following way. Acculturation as a remote cause brings the learner into contact with TL-speakers. Verbal interaction with those speakers as a proximate cause brings about the negotiation of appropriate input which then operates as the immediate cause of language acquisition. Acculturation then is of particular importance because it initiates the chain of causality.

### Acculturation and Language Instruction

Since the Acculturation Model is designed to account for SLA under conditions of immigration where learning takes place without instruction, I have no proposal to make concerning language teaching.

### The Evidence

In this section I will discuss the research designed to test the model that has been undertaken since the model was proposed. The studies are arranged in order of sample size.

Schmidt (1983) presents a case study of a 33 year old Japanese artist named Wes who emigrated from Japan to Hawaii. Schmidt demonstrates that although Wes had the requisite social and psychological proximity to English speakers to acculturate well, he only developed a high degree of communicative competence,<sup>3</sup> but did not acquire comparable linguistic competence in English. Wes was approximately at the mid-mesolang<sup>4</sup> stage or the equivalent of an FSI 1 or 2 in grammar. Given his extensive contact and interaction with English speakers and his ostensible need or motivation to improve his English for professional and personal reasons, the Acculturation Model would predict that he would have achieved greater grammatical proficiency in his spoken English. Thus Schmidt's study provides counter-evidence to the acculturation model.

But Wes's case also creates problems for Krashen's Monitor Model (1982). Given his extensive interaction with English speakers, we can assume that he received sufficient  $i + 1$ <sup>5</sup> input. But evidently this input only resulted in Wes's becoming a good communicator; it did not make him a grammatically proficient speaker of English. This could lead us to tentatively speculate that  $i + 1$  input may be sufficient to produce a communicative competence, but not necessarily to produce grammatical competence.



Kitch (1982) undertook a case study of an adult Spanish-speaker, Mr Diaz, who arrived in the United States at the age of 26. He had only one year of formal instruction in English in Mexico and had lived in the United States for 9 years at the time of the study. Kitch assessed Mr Diaz's development in English negation, verb phrase morphology, and relative clause formation. The results of this linguistic analysis indicated that he was at the upper mesolang stage on the interlanguage continuum. To assess the subject's degree of acculturation, Kitch administered Stauble's (1981) acculturation questionnaire. Mr Diaz seemed to have a high degree of social distance and a low degree of psychological distance.

Perhaps, as Stauble (1978) suggested, there is a hierarchical effect among the acculturation variables such that psychological factors are more important than social ones. This could account for Mr Diaz's high degree of language development. However, in this type of research no principled basis has been found for weighing the various factors. In addition, Kitch's research suffers from another intractable problem in acculturation studies: the historical problem. Did Mr Diaz's social and psychological profile change over time?

Kelley (1982) evaluated the English language proficiency (negation and VP morphology) and the degree of acculturation of 6 Spanish speaking subjects who came to the United States as adults (20–34 years old), had lived here for at least 9 years, had acquired English with little or no instruction and had fossilised at a very low stage of development. To measure acculturation Kelley devised a 48 item questionnaire with a range of possible responses from 1 to 4, with 1 representing maximum social and psychological distance from the target language group and 4 representing minimum distance.

Kelley found that language proficiency was not positively associated with degree of acculturation. In fact the subject that showed the greatest acculturation, Gloria, had the least language development and the subject with the greatest proficiency in English was among the least acculturated. Kelley believes that a plausible explanation for these results may be the freeze-frame nature of the acculturation measures. Gloria, who had been in the United States for 13 years at the time of the study, seemed to have very recently developed a high degree of motivation and a renewed interest in learning English. On the other hand, Felix, who had been in the United States for 20 years, gave the impression that during the first several years of his residence he may have felt more pressure to learn English and that only subsequently did he develop a certain cynicism about the necessity of learning the language and interacting with native speakers.

Kelley also feels the results may have something to do with the fact that each variable may differ with regard to how strongly it affects a learner's acculturation. His research design (like Kitch's) did not permit the assessment of the importance of individual variables. Kelley suggests that 'it is the dynamic varying, and complexly individual nature of affect which makes the

idealized version of the acculturation model difficult to either prove or disprove using one-time results from a quantified questionnaire' (p. 69).

Stauble (1981) studied the English language development of 6 Japanese speakers and 6 Spanish speakers, and then using a 41 item questionnaire evaluated their degree of acculturation to speakers of English. The questionnaire was scored in the same way as in Kelley (1982). The linguistic analysis (negation and VP morphology) showed that 4 subjects had a very low level of proficiency in English, 4 an intermediate level and 4 an upper intermediate level. The three groups were rated as *basilang*, *mesolang* and upper *mesolang*. Stauble reports that she did not find a linear increase in acculturation scores as language proficiency increased. All subjects had similar scores. When *mesolang* and upper *mesolang* scores were combined, *basilang* speakers scored about 10 percentage points below the other two groups, with the biggest difference between the groups being in the number of English speaking associates and amount of target language use.

Stauble offers two reasons for the low association between English proficiency and overall acculturation scores:

1. the small sample
2. the fact that research design provided no principled basis for weighing the various aspects of acculturation assessed by the questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, Kelley (1982) also addressed this problem and suggested that the influence of each factor may vary from subject to subject as well as over time for an individual subject.

Nevertheless, Stauble's study does indicate that increased association with English speakers and increased use of English is related to higher language proficiency. But this still leaves unresolved the chicken or the egg question. Did use of English and association with English speakers cause the greater language proficiency or *vice versa*?

England (1982) in a paper entitled 'The role of integrative motivation in English as a second language among a group of foreign students in the United States' claims, . . . 'some theories, or models have evolved which rely on the integrative motive and its value in language learning.' She then goes on to describe the Acculturation Model and in essence equates acculturation with integrative motivation. Next she reports on a study in which she assessed the extent of integrative motivation among 84 'successful' foreign students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These students, who came from 19 different language backgrounds, were classified as successful because they had received TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores of 490 or higher. Their integrative motivation was assessed using the Professed Difference in Attitude Questionnaire (Acton, 1979) and individual interviews of 9 subjects.

England found that rather than being integratively motivated, an anti-integrative orientation had developed among a sub-set of her subjects who had resided in the United States for 13 to 18 months. She concludes that an

integrative motivation may not be the only orientation necessary for successful second-language acquisition, and she implies that this finding is inconsistent with the claim that acculturation promotes SLA.

The main reason that England's research does not test the model is that she has a different definition of acculturation than that maintained in the model. Therefore, while I view integrative motivation as only one small part of the acculturation construct, England totally equates the two.

The most psychometrically sophisticated examination of the Acculturation Model is Robert Maple's doctoral research completed at the University of Texas at Austin in 1982. The goal of the study was to test the hypothesis that social distance correlates negatively with SLA. The study was conducted in the Intensive English Program at Austin. One hundred and ninety Spanish speaking subjects completed three questionnaires (a total of 100 items) on social distance. In addition, a subsample of 30 subjects was interviewed to corroborate the results generated by the questionnaires. Four means were used to assess ESL proficiency: pre-semester and gain scores on the CELT (Comprehensive English Language Test for Speakers of English as a Second Language), composition and TOEFL scores and final course grades. Data analysed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) computer programs (descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and stepwise multiple regression for both the total sample and subsamples of Venezuelans, Mexicans and upper level students) indicated strong support for 7 of the 8 social distance variables outlined in the Acculturation Model. Only 'congruence of cultures' was not found to be a significant predictor. In addition, two new variables, social class and marital status, introduced by Maple were found to be significant predictors of ESL proficiency. Maple concludes that the

*findings support the hypothesis that social distance correlates negatively with L<sub>2</sub> acquisition ... Multiple regression equations based on social distance variables accounted for 15 to 29 percent of the variation in the various CELT gain scores ... These results suggest that the component variables of social distance are as follows (in descending order of importance): attitudes ... , social class, cohesiveness, intended length of stay, size of L1 group, enclosure, perceived status (p. V-VI).*

Maple's extremely positive results are encouraging but still raise some questions. First of all, he got these results on a population for which the model was not intended. The model as described in Gingras (1978) was applicable to immigrant groups who acquire the target language in the environment in which it is spoken and without the aid of formal introduction. Most of the students in Maple's sample had studied English prior to coming to the United States and then, of course, continued to have instruction while here. In addition, students at a university do not constitute a 'community' as envisioned by the Acculturation Model. They represent a rather narrow age band and generally do not come to the United States as immigrants.

## Discussion

Two issues emerge from the research reported above. The first is that the Acculturation Model, which was designed to account for language learning by immigrant communities, may also be applicable to other groups. Maple's study of university level foreign students lends substantial support to this notion. The second issue relates to a series of technical problems that affect research on the relationship between acculturation and second language acquisition.

It appears that research of this sort cannot be expected to be successful on small sample case studies. For example, d'Anglejan, Renaud, Arseneault & Lortie (1981) undertook a study of the relationship between certain learner traits (non-verbal reasoning, years of schooling, age, use of TL, cognitive style, classroom anxiety, self report of competence in English, contacts with TL speakers, and literacy/illiteracy) and second language achievement. The study was conducted to illustrate that in testing constructs such as the Acculturation Model it is necessary to tease apart the structure of the interactions among the independent and dependent variables, and to do this it is necessary to use certain powerful multivariate inferential statistical techniques that require large sample studies. The authors showed that for a sample of 391 immigrants studying French in Canada, 30% of the variance on the measure of second-language learning was explained by the effect of the 9 predictor variables. The test of non-verbal reasoning predicted 18% of the variance; years of schooling, 4%, age (inversely related), 3% and use of French, 2%. The contribution of the other predictor variables was negligible.

Farhady (1979) examined several models of SLA (Monitor, Neurofunctional, and Acculturation). He argued that the causal claim made by the Acculturation Model made the model testable by sophisticated statistical procedures (such as Path Analysis) which can handle complex interrelations of variables, but only if a causal theory has been articulated beforehand. (See also McLaughlin, 1980.) But Path Analysis also requires a large number of subjects.

However, even large sample multivariate studies will still have serious problems to overcome. Measures of the various factors involved in acculturation may be difficult to devise. This is particularly true of the psychological factors such as cultural shock, language shock and ego permeability. Measures of language proficiency are also a problem. Large sample studies do not permit the detailed analyses of language development that have been conducted on case studies. To assess the language proficiency of large numbers of subjects some sort of elicitation device or test is necessary. To be maximally efficient such tests would have to be in the written form, and thus would create difficulties for subjects who may only have oral proficiency in the TL and may not be able to read or write even in their native language.

Finally, acculturation is a dynamic process that takes place over time. A learner's social and psychological distance profile may change during the

course of his or her stay in the TL environment. None of the research designs either used or proposed for testing the Acculturation Model are capable of handling this problem of history, and the complications involved in large sample longitudinal studies of acculturation and SLA are formidable if not insurmountable.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, as it now stands the Acculturation Model is a conceptual framework which permits the interpretation and understanding of success or failure in SLA in various contact settings. The experimentation that has been conducted has allowed us to view the model from several perspectives: single case studies, multiple case studies, large sample statistical studies, studies of immigrants, students, literates, illiterates, instructed learners, uninstructed learners, groups from one language background, groups from several language backgrounds, older adults, younger adults, studies of social distance only, studies of integrative motivation only, studies of both social and psychological distance, studies using different questionnaires with different scoring procedures, studies providing detailed linguistic analyses of the learners' IL development and studies that provide only language achievement test scores. All these filters shed light on the model in different ways and when carefully examined they can provide us with some understanding of the relationship between acculturation and SLA, but they provide no ultimate answers. What we learn from these studies depends not simply on their results, but more importantly on our ability to intelligently interpret those results.

## Notes

1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the symposium on Current Approaches to Second Language Acquisition, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, March 29–31, 1984.
2. The material in this section (p. 379–385) has been taken largely *verbatim* from Schumann (1978). Permission to re-use this material has been granted by the publishers, the Center for Applied Linguistics.
3. The term communicative competence is used here in a loose sense to refer to those aspects of language other than grammar. The term is not used in contradistinction to strategic competence, discourse competence or sociolinguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1979), and can be seen as referring to general discourse pragmatics.
4. Researchers working in the area of pidginisation and SLA have designated the segments of the SLA continuum with the terms basilect, lower mesolect, mid mesolect, upper mesolect, and acrolect. These terms correspond to basilect, mesolect and acrolect which are used to describe the decreolisation continuum. The terms can be interpreted as representing low, intermediate, and upper levels of proficiency.
5. Krashen defines  $i + 1$  input and speech that is comprehensible to the learner through context and just slightly in advance of his current state of development. The symbol  $i$  represents the

learners' developmental stage and  $+I$  represents the input that is slightly in advance of that stage.

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