

The Role of Creative Imitation in L2 Learning

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SLA researchers have explained how interaction promotes L2 learning from different perspectives. Cognitive interactionists generally explain this phenomenon in terms of the input, production opportunities, and feedback that learners receive in interaction, whereas sociocultural interactionists believe that learners' internalization process is facilitated by the expert-novice or peer interaction. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effect of interaction on L2 learning from either a cognitive or a sociocultural perspective. However, the results are complicated and somewhat contradictory.

After observing that dialogues are full of incomplete discourses and that interlocutors constantly complete and extend such discourses while expressing their ideas, with one interlocutor repeating or absorbing the other's utterances as soon as they encounter language difficulties, Wang (2016) claims that alignment, as an inherent property of interaction, naturally accompanies interaction. He further hypothesizes that language is learned through *xu* (a Chinese word with a compound meaning of 'completion, extension, and creation'), and that efficient learning can be realized through *xu*. Since then, a significant amount of research has focused on the alignment effect elicited by this task. Empirical studies have shown that alignment occurs at different linguistic levels and promotes L2 development. Given that most studies still focus on the factors mediating the effect of alignment (interaction intensity, input characteristics, task conditions, etc.) and its effect on different aspects (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, etc.) of L2 learning, and that there is little attempt to address creative imitation, another important facilitating feature of the continuation task, this research aims to explore the role of creative imitation in L2 learning. Two general research questions are proposed: 1) Under what conditions creative imitation takes place? 2) Does creative imitation affect L2 learning? If the answer is yes, how does learning come about due to creative imitation?

Keywords: *xu*-argument, interaction, alignment, L2 learning, creative imitation