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**Input Flood****WHAT IS INPUT FLOOD?**

What does the word *flood* mean to you? Here are some sentences that contain the word *flood*.

The heavy rain resulted in a catastrophic flood in the area.

We were flooded with phone calls all day long.

When I returned from vacation, my e-mail account was flooded with junk mail.

There is a virtual flood of techniques dealing with grammar instruction.

As these examples illustrate, we use the word *flood* to mean "lots of" something. In language teaching, if we want our learners to notice a particular feature of the target language, we could flood the input with that particular linguistic feature. This technique is known as **input flood**.

In input flood, the input learners receive is saturated with the form that we hope learners will notice and possibly acquire. We don't usually highlight the form in any way to draw attention to it nor do we tell learners to pay attention to the form. We merely saturate the input with the form. The basic idea here is that by flooding the input with many exemplars of the form, learners will have an increased chance to notice it. Recall that in order for input to be usable for language acquisition, learners must attend to it or notice it in some way. Gass (1997) points out that the frequency of a particular target structure can have an impact on noticing. She explains that a target structure that appears frequently in input is more likely to be noticed by learners (p. 17).

**How Is Input Flood Carried Out?**

Input flood can be carried out with both written and oral input. In the written mode, input is modified so that many exemplars of the target form can be embedded in the instructional materials. A story or an article, for example,

could be modified so that the target item can appear over and over again. In the oral mode, the target item could be embedded in natural speech or it could be embedded in written input and then read aloud to students. Sometimes we may find some authentic materials where there are already many instances of the form. In this case, very little (or no) modification may be necessary.

**Pause to consider . . .**

oral and written input. Do you think learners need both oral and written input? Do you think learners will notice forms more easily in oral input or written input? Why?

The following is an example of how an original text may be modified so that it contains many more exemplars of a target structure, in this case, the possessive determiners *his* and *her*. This text is taken from a collection of stories based on Chinese mythology. A sample from the original text is presented first followed by the flooded version. (Note: The items are bolded for the benefit of the reader of this text only. There is no need to include boldface when using input flood.)

(Original version)

Many moons ago there lived an officer in the Yellow Emperor's Imperial Guard named Hou Yi. Hou Yi was a skilled archer and his bow, no ordinary weapon, was enchanted. Hou Yi had married Chang E, the beautiful daughter of the River God. Hou Yi and Chang E were very much in love. They seemed happy, but, in fact, they wanted something more: Both Hou Yi and Chang E longed to live forever.

—From "Moonbeams, Dumplings and Dragon Boats," Simonds & Swartz, 2002

(Flooded version)

Many moons ago there lived an officer in the Yellow Emperor's Imperial Guard named Hou Yi. Hou Yi was a skilled archer and *his* bow, no ordinary weapon, was enchanted. Hou Yi had married Chang E, the beautiful daughter of the River God. The day Hou Yi asked the River God for *his* daughter's hand in marriage, *her* father was deeply saddened because he knew he would miss seeing *her* charming face everyday. However, because Hou Yi was an excellent and loyal officer, the River God decided to grant *his* wish and gave him *his* daughter. He looked at Chang E lovingly, took *her* hand and gave her to *her* new husband. Hou Yi and Chang E were very much in love. They seemed very happy, but, in fact, they wanted something more: Hou Yi and *his* wife, Chang E, longed to live forever.

Notice how the input in the original text was modified so that it contains many more exemplars of possessive determiners. The original text contained 33 exemplars of possessive determiners. In the flooded version, there were 65. The essential meaning of the story, however, did not change. A piece of input was simply saturated so that learners could encounter many more instances of the target item.

The above example serves to illustrate how input flood can be carried out with an authentic text. Instructors, of course, could also choose to create their own texts to carry out input flood as with the following French example. The target structures here are the prepositions *à* and *en* used with geographical locations (both mean "to" or "in" depending on context). In French, the preposition *à* is used with cities and *en* with countries of feminine grammatical gender. Since this is an instructor generated text, there is only the flooded version (Again, the bolding of the targets is for the benefit of the reader of this text only).

*Lise est célibataire et elle est le deuxième enfant des Pinard. Elle a 30 ans et elle est professeur de français en Angleterre. Lise aime beaucoup les langues et voyager. Lise parle français, italien, allemand et anglais. Actuellement, Lise habite à Londres, mais l'an prochain, elle va aller en Chine dans le cadre d'un programme d'échange. Elle va enseigner le français dans une université à Shanghai et en même temps, elle apprendra le chinois.*

Lise is single and she is the second child of the Pinard family. She is 20 years old and she is a French teacher in England. Lise likes languages and traveling very much. Lise speaks French, Italian, German and English. Currently, Lise lives in London, but next year, she will go to China as part of an exchange program. She will teach French in a university in Shanghai and at the same time, she will learn Chinese.

In the complete version of this teacher generated text, out of 335 words there were 14 instances of the target structure. The number of exemplars, however, is not the issue here. There is currently no recipe to dictate how many exemplars is optimal for an input flood. However, if frequency may impact noticing as Gass (1997) suggests, then we may perhaps conclude that the more exemplars we can work in a flood the better. Furthermore, I should point out that it is not necessary to provide all the exemplars in the same text or even present all the exemplars or texts on the same day. In one use of input flood (Overstreet, 2000), multiple texts were provided over 2 weeks. In that particular instance, learners were exposed to almost 100 examples of the target item. The key here is that there is a deliberate attempt to expose learners to many examples of the target item via meaning-bearing input.

One important factor that instructors do want to pay attention to in carrying out input flood is to make sure that the level of difficulty of the input is appropriate for the learners in question. Recall that good input needs to be comprehensible. If learners need to struggle with extracting meaning from the text, they will probably not notice the flooded target structures no matter how frequently they may appear in the input.

### Does Input Flood Work?

A handful of studies have investigated what learners can be expected to do after exposure to input that has been flooded with target forms. We will review two sample studies here.

One of the first empirical studies on input flood was conducted by Trahey and White (1993). These researchers wanted to know whether input flood would be effective in teaching young French-speaking ESL learners (ages 10-12) adverb placement in English. Adverb placement is a challenge for these learners because the rules for adverb placement in French are different from English. For example, English allows the following sentences:

John watches TV often.  
John often watches TV.

but English does not allow the adverb to come between the verb and the object that follows it (an asterisk means a sentence is not grammatically correct):

\*John watches often TV.

French is similar to English in one adverb construction:

Jean regard la télé souvent.  
John watches TV often.

but different from English in that it allows the following that include an adverb between the verb and object:

Jean regard souvent la télé.  
\*John watches often TV.

and does not allow the adverb to precede the verb as English does:

\*Jean souvent regard la télé.  
John often watches TV.

Trahey and White saturated the input that these young learners received with hundreds of instances of English adverbs over a two-week period. Keep in mind that they were never explicitly taught the rules for adverb placement nor were they ever given any error correction. Adverbs were simply embedded in their instructional materials (i.e., stories and games). Overall, the results of this study showed that the input flood was effective in helping the students learn which adverb placement positions were possible in English. However, the flood did not appear to be effective in helping them learn which positions were *not* possible. For example, the flood enabled them to learn that in English, it is possible to have an adverb between the subject and the verb as in the sentence *Anna carefully drives her new car* (this is not permissible in French but permissible in English as we saw above). However, they also thought that sentences such as *\*Anna drives carefully her new car* (permissible in French but not in English) were also correct. Thus, the results of this study suggest that input flood may help provide learners with information about what is correct or what might be

lacking in their linguistic system but it may not be very effective in showing them what is *not* correct.

#### Pause to consider . . .

Trahey and White's study. In this study, learners learned what was possible but not what was prohibited. What does this suggest about input flood as a technique? Do you think the results would have been different if they had picked a structure like third-person -s (e.g., he talks)? How is this structure different from adverb placement?

Another study on input flood was conducted by Williams and Evans (1998). These researchers wanted to see how input flood and a second condition in which learners were also given explicit rules and feedback could impact the learning of two target forms: participial adjectives (e.g., a *closed* door) and the passive construction in English (e.g., The door *was closed* by 9:00.). The subjects for this study were adult ESL learners. In the input flood condition, the learners received a flood of input that contained the target forms via a series of reading materials. No explicit rules or instructions were provided, and no corrective feedback was given. The second condition in this experiment was called the "instruction condition." The researchers called this the instruction condition because in addition to the flooded input, these learners were also taught the rules underlying the use of the target forms and were given feedback during activities. Overall, the results showed that for the participial adjective form, both the input flood group and the instructed group made improvements on posttests that tested this form. However, the group that received rules and feedback in addition to input flood had higher scores. For the passive construction, both the input flood group and the instructed group again made significant improvements from pretest to posttest but this time, there was not a significant difference between these two groups. In other words, both groups performed just as well. What these results suggest is that the target form can make a difference. Having rules and feedback in addition to input flood was more effective than input flood alone when the target form was participial adjectives (as measured by the posttests). However, when the form was the passive construction, having rules and feedback did not matter. Input flood by itself was just as effective.

#### Pause to consider . . .

the roles of explicit rules and feedback. In the Williams and Evans study, giving learners rules and feedback helped for one target form but not for another. What do these results suggest about the role of explicit rules and feedback in L2 instruction in general? Do you think that explicit instruction is necessary or beneficial no matter what technique or what form?

What observations could we make about the effectiveness of input flood from these two experiments? Before drawing any conclusions, we should first consider the contexts in which the two experiments were conducted. The subjects in Trahey and White's study were children between the ages of 10–12. They were native speakers of French learning English as a foreign language. The participants in Williams and Evans' study were adults learning English as a second language. The target structures under investigation as well as the research questions asked in the two studies were also different so we need to be cautious when comparing the two studies. With these cautions and limitations in mind, we may glean a few insights about input flood from these studies. One observation is that input flood did cause some learning to happen in both studies. In the Trahey and White study, input flood helped the learners realize that in English, adverbs can be placed in some positions that are not possible in French. In the Williams and Evans study, learners performed better on tests that measured participial adjectives and the passive construction after they received input that was flooded with the target structures. This suggests that exposing learners to meaning-bearing input that has been saturated with the target form can have a positive impact on SLA (at least in these two research contexts). Some limitations, however, also can be observed. Input flood does not appear to be effective in showing learners what is not possible in the target language (at least for learning adverb placement). Recall that in the Trahey and White study, the learners continued to think that the incorrect adverb positions were possible in English. Here is a case, perhaps, where learners might benefit from explicit information. Because learners cannot know from input alone what is not possible in an L2, being explicitly told so might help them process input more efficiently. Nevertheless, the finding that input flood alone can lead to some kind of learning shows that this technique can have some kind of impact on SLA.

### Pause to consider . . .

the difference between the Trahey and White (1993) and Williams and Evans (1998) studies. One of the differences between the two studies was the age of the participants. How might you design an experiment to investigate whether the age of learners is an important factor when examining the effectiveness of input flood?

### What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Input Flood in the L2 Classroom?

One of the main advantages of input flood is that it involves the provision of lots of meaning-bearing input. As we saw in Chapter 3, meaning-bearing input is an essential ingredient of SLA. Another advantage of this technique is that it does not disrupt the flow of communication or the focus of any communicative activity. Doughty and Williams (1998) describe input flood as one of the least

*obtrusive* techniques because the learners' attention can remain focused on the meaningful task at hand (p. 258). When we say that a technique is not obtrusive, we mean that the teacher does not stop an activity or exchange to point anything out. Input flood, then, is ideal for meaning-based approaches where the primary focus of the class is always on meaning and meaningful interaction. Content and task-based L2 classes are examples of such meaning-based classes. As you may recall from Chapter 1, in a content class, learners learn different subject matters such as geography, history and economics in the L2. In a task-based class, the goal of each lesson is to complete specific tasks. Input flood could easily be worked into the course materials of such classes. For example, in a history class on the French Revolution, the instructor could simply manipulate lecture notes and reading materials so that this input contains many uses of a particular target form. That's all the instructor would need to do. In fact, another advantage of this technique is that it is easy to use. No special teaching or explaining is needed. All the instructor needs to do is saturate the input with the target form.

Of course, a disadvantage of input flood is that because this technique is so *implicit*, it is difficult for instructors to know whether learners are actually learning anything through the flood. By *implicit*, I mean that other than embedding the form in the input, nothing else is done to point out the form to the learner. Thus, we cannot be sure that learners will actually notice the form. Sharwood Smith further reminds us that we can only expect input enhancement to increase the chance that learners will notice the form. There is no guarantee that they actually will. What input flood does guarantee is a good dose of meaning-bearing input that can be injected virtually anywhere in a lesson plan.

### Pause to consider . . .

the nature of foreign language classes in the United States. Many classes are built around a structural syllabus. Such a syllabus is structured around grammatical features, for example, the first chapter may be on the present tense or particular aspects of the present tense. Can we use input flood with such a syllabus where there may be a new grammar topic presented each day? If you used input flood to teach grammar, how might you test grammar?

### How Do We Implement Input Flood in the L2 Classroom?

We mentioned earlier that input flood is ideal for meaning-based classrooms but this technique can actually be adapted for use in virtually any type of classroom. If there is a structure that learners need to pay more attention to, instructors could simply modify some of the material to include a flood of that structure for a period of time. Target items could be embedded in existing instructional

materials such as readings, games, and other activities and exercises. Instructors could even flood their instructions to students or other classroom-management agenda items with the target items. Here is an example of how an instructor might give instructions with input flood. The target form here is the 2nd person plural subjunctive form in French (the forms are underlined for the benefit of the reader only).

*Il faut que vous arriviez en classe à l'heure demain. Nous avons un examen. Il est pertinent que vous étudiez bien ce soir. Il est nécessaire que vous révisiez les chapitres trois, quatre et cinq ainsi que les lectures supplémentaires. N'oubliez pas votre cahier d'exercices. Il est préférable que vous complétiez les exercices avant d'aller en classe. Comme je vous ai dit la dernière fois, il est nécessaire que vous corrigiez tous les exercices avant de me les rendre. N'oubliez pas vos crayons. Il est préférable que vous écriviez vos examens en crayon. Avez-vous des questions?*

It is necessary that you arrive to class on time tomorrow. We have a test. It's pertinent that you study well this evening. It's necessary that you review chapters three, four and five as well as the supplementary readings. Don't forget your workbook. It's preferred that you complete the exercises before going to class. As I told you last time, it's necessary that you correct all the exercises before you turn them into me. Don't forget your pencils. It's preferred that you write your exams in pencil. Any questions?

Additionally, in actual language classrooms, instructors do not have to be limited to one type of input enhancement. Instructors can and often should make use of many techniques at the same time to meet their needs. We said earlier that because input flood is so implicit, we may not know whether learners actually do notice the forms in the flood. To increase the likelihood that they will notice them, the instructor could explicitly tell learners to pay attention to the forms or they could have learners perform a task with the flooded input that would require them to notice the target forms. For example, in the flooded text presented earlier based on Chinese mythology, learners may be asked to answer comprehension questions that require them to notice and process possessive determiners correctly in order to arrive at the correct responses.

The following story is a tale from Chinese mythology. Read each section of the story carefully and answer the questions that follow. We will go over the answers together after each section.

### The Story of Hou Yi and Chang E

Many moons ago there lived an officer in the Yellow Emperor's Imperial Guard named Hou Yi. Hou Yi was a skilled archer and his bow, no ordinary weapon, was enchanted. Hou Yi had married Chang E, the beautiful daughter of the River God. The day Hou Yi asked the River God for his daughter's hand in marriage, her father was deeply saddened because he knew he would miss seeing her charming face everyday. However, because Hou Yi was an excellent and loyal officer, the River God decided to grant his wish and gave him his

daughter. He looked at Chang E lovingly, took her hand and gave her to her new husband. Hou Yi and Chang E were very much in love. They seemed very happy, but, in fact, they wanted something more: Both Hou Yi and Chang E longed to live forever.

1. Who is Hou Yi?
  - a. The River God
  - b. An officer
2. Whose face would the River God miss seeing?
  - a. Chang E's face.
  - b. Hou Yi's face.
3. Whose wish did the River God grant?
  - a. Chang E's wish.
  - b. Hou Yi's wish.
4. Whose hand did the River God take?
  - a. Hou Yi's hand.
  - b. Chang E's hand.
5. What did Hou Yi and Chang E wish for?
  - a. To forever stay in love.
  - b. To have immortality.

As this example illustrates, the second, third, and fourth comprehension questions encourage learners to notice the target forms, that is to say, possessive determiners *his* and *her*. For example, in order to answer the second question correctly, learners have to pay attention to the possessive determiner *her* in the phrase "... he would miss seeing her charming face everyday," and understand that *her* refers to Chang E (it is assumed that learners know that Chang E is a woman's name and that Hou Yi is a man's name). As you can see, this type of activity would encourage learners to pay attention to the flooded forms in the input.

Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995) propose that learners be directed to perform *focused-noticing exercises* with the flooded input. In order to encourage learners to notice the difference between their own grammars and the target grammar, they propose that learners be explicitly directed to notice the use of the target form-meaning associations through exercises such as the following on past tense verbs (p. 123):

- a. [based on the reading passage], find a sentence with one verb in the simple past. Write it on the line below.
  - b. Find a sentence with one simple past verb and one past progressive verb. Write it on the line below.
  - c. Kerwin [the narrator] used the following verbs in the past progressive. He also used them in the simple past. Find the simple past forms, write them beside the past progressive and write the line where you found them. Look at the way the past progressive and the simple past are used. Can you tell a difference in meaning?
- | Past Progressive (lines 1-2) | Simple Past | Line  |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| was walking (lines 1-2)      | _____       | _____ |
| was doing (lines 55-56)      | _____       | _____ |

The point here is that instructors do not need to rely on input flood alone to draw learners' attention to form if such a technique is adopted. Instructors could lead learners to perform focusing activities based on the flood or they could use the flood in conjunction with other techniques. The main benefit of a flood is that learners are given a shot of extra meaning-bearing input, input that is fundamental for acquisition. If instructors wish to make the forms in that input more salient, more explicit techniques could be added (as discussed in later chapters in this book).

**Remember to Keep Meaning in Focus**

In attempting to flood classroom input with exemplars of the target, instructors must not lose sight of the primary goal of language: to communicate meaning. While it may be desirable to expose learners to lots of examples of the target, this must not be done at the expense of meaning and authentic communication. This is important to point out because it is sometimes easy to get carried away with trying to find opportunities to embed the target form. When this happens, meaning may be compromised and language may become unnatural. In such cases, language may no longer be used for communication but for display purposes only. When using input flood, instructors should ask: "Once learners listen to or read the input, what are they supposed to do?" In order for the flood to be meaningful, they must do something with the input. If you look at the sample activities in this chapter and the Appendix, you will notice that learners don't just read or listen. They are required to *respond to the input* in some way. In short, we don't just "throw" the input at them. In the above example where we flooded the instructions with the target form (i.e., the French subjunctive), learners were expected to follow the instructors' instructions after listening to them. Here are some examples of other things learners could be expected to do after receiving flooded input:

- take a quiz on the content;
- answer questions based on the flooded input;
- perform some kind of task based on the flooded input (e.g., reconstruct a story, draw a picture based on oral directions, play a game, etc.)

The point here is that input flood does not stop with simply giving learners the input; learners must do something meaningful with that flooded input.

**Pause to consider . . .**

this idea of having to do something with the input you are exposed to. Look once again at this chapter's example in French in which the teacher gives instructions and embeds multiple examples of the second-person plural of the subjunctive. How could the teacher follow these instructions with a task for the learners that shows if they were paying attention? Note: the answer is *not* to provide a quiz on the forms in question!

**SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

As this chapter has demonstrated, input flood has many potential uses for the classroom. Input flood is a good way to provide learners with the meaning-bearing input that they need for SLA while exposing them to lots of examples of particular L2 items at the same time. Research has shown that when learners receive enough of this input, they may notice these features more. Another advantage of input flood is that it is very versatile. Input flood can be integrated with virtually any teaching approach, lesson plan, activity or exercise. In the next chapter, we will see how input flood can be integrated with what is called "textual enhancement."

**ENHANCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

**Input Enhancement Techniques**

Doughty, J., & Williams, J. (1998). Pedagogical choices in focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in second language classroom acquisition* (pp. 197-261). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

**Input Flood**

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