Second Language Acquisition
Interview Analysis

Interview conducted 7/1/10
Interviewee: John P.
First Language: Haitian Creole, French

Introduction
John is a 44 year old Haitian man who has been a permanent resident in the U.S. for about 6 years. I have been tutoring John through the Marin Literacy Program on a once-a-week basis for approximately 2 ½ months. John had some previous ESL classes in Florida before coming to the Bay Area, but his English learning has mostly been informal and unstructured. He found out about the Marin Literacy Project through a friend and has been eager to improve his English skills in order to improve his life and achieve important goals like having his daughter come live with him when he can afford a bigger apartment, and eventually, becoming a U.S. citizen.

Interview Transcription

Legend

Sentence, word, and morpheme count
Each sentence is preceded by a bracket containing three numbers as follows:
[Sequential sentence number. Number of words/Number of morphemes]

Example: [1. 3/4] I’m from Haiti.
1 = This is sentence #1.
3 = This sentence contains three words.
4 = This sentence contains four morphemes.

Error indication
Each error is attributed by a set of codes within parenthesis which correspond to explanations of error types. The error codes and explanations are as follows:

Category
(ad) addition
(om) omission
(su) substitution
(wo) word order
(er) interlingual
(ra) intralingual
(co) misinterpretation of input (comprehension)

Linguistic level
(ph) phonology
(in) intonation
(le) lexicon
(gr) grammar
(di) discourse

Intralanguage Stage
(i1) presystematic
(i2) emergent
(i3) systematic
(i4) stabilization

Example: Yes, Creole and Fwench (cr/ph)
RW: Where are you from, John?
RW: And how long have you been living in the U.S.?
JP: [2. 9/11] I’ve been here for six years and eleven month\textsuperscript{(en/gr/12)}.
RW: And do you like it?
RW: What do you like about living in the U.S.?
JP: [4. 10/10] I like the\textsuperscript{(ra/i2)} country because this is a big country\textsuperscript{(ra/di/i2)}.
[5. 4/4] I like the people.
[6. 6/8] American people\textsuperscript{(ra/i2)} very very\textsuperscript{(er/ph)} friendly.
[7. 4/4] Hmm, I like, I like\textsuperscript{(er/i2)} country.
RW: And what is your native language?
RW: And what is Creole?
JP: [9. 5/5] Creole is\textsuperscript{(er/i4)}\textsuperscript{(er/ph)}\textsuperscript{moder}\textsuperscript{(er/ph)} language. My moder language.
RW: Does it have some French in it?
JP: [10. 4/4] Yes, Creole and F\texttextsuperscript{wrench}.\textsuperscript{(er/ph)}
RW: How old were you when you started learning English?
JP: (no response)
RW: How old were you when you first started learning English?
JP: [11. 2/2] Uh, in Florida\textsuperscript{(co)}.
RW: Oh, in Florida. Ok. And so that was how long ago?
RW: And how did you start studying English?
JP: Where?

RW: That was adult school?


RW: Ok. (pause) Can you briefly describe your daily activities?

JP: Now?

RW: Yeah.

JP: [15. 14/18] Yeah, I’m working (ra/gr/i1)...I’m working ev (gr/i1), (unintelligible) housekeeping...and den (su/ph), I have ev (gr/i1)...new...eh...eh...eh...on-call job.

[16. 5/8] Yeah, dats (su/ph) I’m (em/i1), I’m doing now.

RW: Well, tell me how your start your day. What are some of your routines?

JP: (no response)

RW: Like getting ready and eating and so on...

JP: [17. 3/4] I don’t understand (co).

RW: So, tell me what you do when you get up in the morning.

JP: [18. 15/15] Oh, when I get up I take a shower and then I take (su/er/i1) eh (i1) some coffee.

[19. 6/8] After that, I’m going (ra/gr/i1) to work.

RW: Ok.

JP: [20. 21/22] And den (su/ph) today, after I-I get off, I take a shower and den I prepawing (su/ph/i1) to come here for de (su/ph/i1) English.

RW: Oh, did you work last night?

JP: Yes.

RW: When do you start your day?

RW: Yeah, when do you start? What hours do you work?

JP: Oh. [22. 7/9] Yesterday, I’m working\(^{(ra/\text{gr/i1})}\), ah, at free\(^{(as/\text{ph/i1})}\) to ten.

RW: Three p.m. to ten a.m.?

JP: [23. 3/4] To ten p.m.

RW: Three p.m. to ten p.m. Ok. Ok, so if you had to describe how well you speak English, how well do you think you speak English right now?

JP: Yeah...

RW: Perfect, or very well, or moderately well, or not so good, or hardly at all? These are the...

JP: [24. 4/5] I think it’s perfect.

RW: Perfect! Ok. I do to! I think your English is perfect (smiling, not knowing what to make of this) Ok, very good. Um, a few more questions...Ok, so one more time, tell me about your jobs. You have how many jobs right now?

JP: [25. 6/7] I have two jobs right now.

RW: And you have a new job?

JP: [26. 5/6] Yes, dis\(^{(as/\text{ph/i1})}\) is ey\(^{(gr/i1})\) on-call\(^{(om/\text{le/i1})}\).

[27. 6/6] Yeah, is\(^{(om/di/i1})\) not ey\(^{(gr/i1})\) full time...

RW: I see.

JP: Maybe...

RW: So they call you up?

JP: Yeah.

RW: And then you go in and work.

JP: Yeah.

RW: And what do you do?

JP: [28. 4/7] I’m doing\(^{(ra/\text{gr/i1})}\) eh...parking lot\(^{(om/\text{le/i1})}\).

[29. 6/7] Parking lot to drive ey car\(^{(om/di/i1})\).
RW: Uh huh.

JP: Moving (om/ra) dey (su/ph) car in dey parking lot, for de (su/ph) residents (wo/di).

RW: Ok. What’s your other job?

JP: Housekeeping.

RW: Is that one place, or different places?

JP: Different places.

RW: Ok, and do you work by yourself or with other people?

JP: I’m (unintelligible), I’m working (ra/gr) with other people. The second one I’m working (ra/gr) (om/le) myself.

RW: Tell me a little about your family. How big is your family?

JP: My daughter...?

RW: Well, your daughters, and maybe your family in Haiti, too.

JP: Yeah, I have two daughters here. One (om/le) Florida.

RW: Hmm hmm, and then you have family in Haiti...?

JP: Yes, I have family in Haiti.

RW: How big is your family in Haiti?

JP: ...ah... (pause)

RW: How many people?

JP: Oh, too (su/le/i3) many people.

RW: A lot of people...

JP: A lot of people.

RW: Uh huh.

JP: Cousin, cousine...
RW: Are your parents alive?

JP: Yes.

RW: Ok, both your mother and your father...

JP: No. [43. 8/8] Eh my, my moder (su/ph) is left and my fadder (su/ph) is die (su/gr).

RW: Oh, how old were you when your father died?

JP: [44. 6/9] Oh, maybe, eighty, eighty, eighty something. Eighty-two, eighty... (co/i3)

RW: He died in eighty-two?

JP: Yeah.

RW: Ok.

JP: No. [45. 3/4] He was eighty-two.

RW: Oh, he was eighty-two. Ok.

JP: [46. 6/7] He is die (su/gr) in nineteen ninety-two.

RW: How old were you when he died?

JP: [47. 8/12] Oh, maybe I’m (gr)...twenty, twenty-four or five, something; [48. 3/3] I not (su/gr) remember.

RW: Ok...How did you hear about the Marin Literacy Project?


[50. 5/6] Some Haitian (om) in de pwogwam (su/ph).

[51. 5/7] She’s askin’ (gr) me about dat (su/ph/i1)/(di/i1).

RW: She told you?

JP: Hmm hmm.

RW: Ok. And what are some of the goals you have—that we talked about the other day?

JP: [52. 9/10] Yeah, my goals, (ad/di) hmm...I need to, to...to speak bedder (su/ph) English...eh...

[53. 5/5] I need to...hmm...I need to be, to be (su/gr) citizen.

[54. 6/6] And den (su/ph), de serve, de (le) serve dis (su/ph) country.
R. Walker

OK: Ok, very good. Thank you.


### MLU / Assigned Level

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sentences/utterances</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of morphemes</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of words per sentence</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of morphemes per sentence</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added means of words and morphemes</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLU / Assigned Level</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pronunciation Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted had a good idea, didn’t he?</td>
<td>Terd(ér) had a good idea, did(om) he’y(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s thank her for the theater tickets.</td>
<td>Let’s ṭank(ṣu) her (om) de teeter(ṣu) teckuts(ṣu).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know whether the weather bothers them?</td>
<td>Do you know whedder(ṣu) de(ṣu) weadder(ṣu) bodders(ṣu) dem(ṣu)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was single, I sang long songs.</td>
<td>When I was single, I səng(ér) long songs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate ham, but I ate it anyway.</td>
<td>I ḥa(ṣu) ham, but I ate it anyway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We visited William in Washington.</td>
<td>We visited William in Washington.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today is a splendid spring day.</td>
<td>Today is(om) splendid spring day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did he talk to dead men?</td>
<td>Did he talk to dead men?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At last a lucky man married Pat.</td>
<td>At lea(tṣu) a lowky(ér) man murr(ṣu)ed(ṣu) Pat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought I saw Paul.</td>
<td>I tought(ṣu) I saw(ेr) Paul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Ronald’s answers are wrong.</td>
<td>All Wonald’s(ṣu) ansWers(ṣu) are Wrong(ṣu).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie cooks delicious Russian rice.</td>
<td>Murr(ेr) cooks delishiouz(ेr) Wooshan(ṣu) rice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Analysis

John’s native language is Haitian Creole with some French and he experiences a significant amount of interlingual influence on his pronunciation. He has difficulty producing and distinguishing three phonemes in particular: ‘l’, ‘r’, and voiced and unvoiced versions of ‘th’. Much confusion has arisen when scheduling our tutoring sessions on either Tuesday or Thursday. To John’s ear when I say the names of these days, and to my ear when he says them, they are practically indistinguishable. John has generally avoided the ‘th’ sound and substituted
‘t’ for unvoiced ‘th’ and ‘d’ for the voiced ‘th’. John’s accent is otherwise noticeably non-native, but not unintelligibly so.

Though having lived in the U.S. for six years, John’s context of learning has been largely informal and unstructured resulting in English skills that are at the high beginning level. He has not been able to systematically perceive or address problems affecting communicative competence and has remained at the intralanguage stage. He has consistent difficulty comprehending spoken utterances and making himself understood. I attribute much of John’s communicative difficulties to unfamiliarity and practice with grammar basics such as tense and determiners and intralingual issues such as overgeneralization.

In that the three aforementioned phonemes present a persistent challenge to John, this would seem to support the Critical Period Hypothesis in regards to accent. I have however, been focusing regular attention on these phonemes with visual description and demonstration of proper articulation and he is showing steady improvement with them. I believe this will steadily help to improve John’s difficulties with being understood.

I do not, however, find any evidence to support the CHP in terms of John’s cognitive function. He is intelligent, and in regards to the affective domain, very motivated and diligent about learning. I attribute his lack of progress beyond high beginner in learning English to Context of Learning rather than any notion of the CHT. Now that he has been able to re-engage in a semi-formal program of study, I believe he will steadily progress towards greater communicative competence.

I believe also that John’s experience does not support certain aspects of Krashen’s Input Hypotheses. Krashen’s concept of acquisition is too informal a process to meet John’s needs. His Context of Learning has already been too informal. He has specifically told me that he needs “help with [his] English skills.” He is eager to engage with grammar and vocabulary in a
structured way. He wants to understand, practice, and apply rules that will support him in his desire to speak better English.

In order for John to improve his skills he will need to use his “monitor” actively much of the time. But I believe it more useful to think of John’s ascending the stages of Interlanguage Development to the point where he can self-correct without external prompting. This will greatly enhance his prospects for achieving communicative competence in critical real-world contexts like employment or interacting with government, business, or other formal organizational settings.

I believe the best way to expose the “natural order” for learning form is to address them as they arise in communicative contexts of relevant conversation and reading. If certain phonemes are causing problems, they should be addressed. Likewise for grammar forms such as tense and articles, or functions such as negotiating appointments, explaining a problem, or applying for a job.

I certainly concur with Krashen’s emphasis on the importance of lowering the affective filter. I have experienced the difficulty of a tense language-learning classroom first hand and need no further convincing. There are many useful aspects to lowering affective filter, from acknowledging each learner's person-hood, to demonstrating that making mistakes are a valuable part of the learning process. Ultimately, the interchange between teacher and learner should be positive, enjoyable, and in line with common goals of learning and self-improvement. I believe that John responds well to the hard work of learning when he knows there’s no reason to feel bad about any part of the process.

I believe John has mostly fully acculturated in so far as he is very comfortable and glad to be living in America. He is generally a mild-mannered, good-natured person, which seems to me make it easy for him to feel at home here. This is not dismiss the real challenges that he faces due to communicative competence issues, but culturally—especially here in the Bay Area, with
it’s rich history of immigrant experience, acceptance, and celebration—I believe he feels at home, and want’s to make it his permanent home.

My conclusion is that John needs focused attention and practice with certain basic problem areas of grammar and pronunciation. An improved facility with basic grammar skills of tense, pronouns, articles, as well as recognition and improvement with hearing and producing a few problematic phonemes, will improve John’s prospects for finding better employment and achieving his goal of becoming a U.S. citizen. I am mindful to place John’s practice during our session within communicative contexts which are relevant to him and connected to his experience. Not only does basing practice in realistic contexts make the learning relevant and meaningful, it is also useful for surfacing those areas that are in need of work. During discussions about his experiences, desires, or problems that he faces, errors of various kinds are exposed and can be examined in terms similar to the perspectives presented here in this analysis.