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**FOREIGN LANGUAGE INPUT: INITIAL PROCESSING.** *Rebekah Rast. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters*, 2008. Pp. xvi + 261.

At the core of this book is an empirical study with a unique goal: to control and fully document the linguistic environment (i.e., input) available to second language (L2) learners from the first minutes of exposure to determine how that input is processed, comprehended, and analyzed by true beginners of a target language (TL). Rast's book answers the call for research on the initial stages of SLA while distinguishing itself from previous studies in which artificial languages were used (cf. de Graaff, 1997; DeKeyser, 1997). Rast opted for a natural language (Polish) presented to learners in a classroom—not laboratory—environment. To situate the study in a broader context, Rast begins by reviewing the concepts of input and intake as these are defined in various theoretical approaches (connectionist, interactionist, generativist, and cognitivist models). After a summary of the relevant previous literature, chapter 3 presents a brief overview of the structural properties of Polish, and chapter 4 outlines the methodology of the study.

The methodology is complex and deserves further commentary. The main study involved eight monolingual French speakers who attended a specially designed Polish course. The lessons followed a communicative approach in which metalanguage and explicit grammatical instruction were avoided. The input received by the learners during the first 8 hr was carefully controlled and recorded. The learners were tested at three different times during this period (after 1.5 hr, 3.5 hr, and 7 hr of input) using several measures. A separate but complementary study was conducted with another group of French speakers ($n = 96$) who did not attend the Polish course: They completed the sentence repetition and word translation tasks without any knowledge or prior exposure to Polish. The rationale for including this group was twofold: (a) to investigate the influence of prior linguistic knowledge (other L2s) on the recognition of Polish words and (b) to establish a baseline measure of lexical transparency for TL words that would be encountered in the Polish lessons.

The results are presented over five chapters, beginning with the performance of the first exposure group—that is, the participants who did not attend the Polish course. The findings are not entirely surprising: French speakers with some knowledge of Russian or German showed some advantage in terms of word recognition. Rast concludes that learners activate all prior linguistic knowledge (native language and all L2s) in search of something familiar in novel stimuli. More importantly, the results in chapter 5 establish which Polish words are more likely to be recognized by absolute beginners on the basis of their degree of phonological and orthographic similarity to the first language and L2s of the participants; for example, *kolega* "colleague" was correctly recognized by 76% of the participants, whereas *brat* "brother" was recognized by only 6%. These recognition rates serve to classify Polish words as more or less transparent, a variable that proves to be significant in speech perception (discussed in chapter 7).

Three chapters (7, 8, and 9) present group data from the eight learners who attended the Polish course. The results are divided into speech perception (measured by a sentence repetition task), speech comprehension (measured by an oral translation task), and grammatical analysis (measured by word order tests, grammaticality judgments, and written translations). The detailed nature of the results cannot be summarized adequately given the space limitations here. Nevertheless, several trends are

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worthy of note. First, the results show that a great deal of implicit learning can occur in just 8 hr of exposure; for example, all learners were able to correctly place the negator *nie* "not" in preverbal position after 7 hr of input (note that they initially struggled with the placement of this particle). Similarly, learners picked up on the tendency of the third person reflexive pronoun *się* to appear in postverbal position despite the fact that French reflexive pronouns appear preverbally. Second, the findings reveal important individual differences in SLA. Rast devotes chapter 6 to the linguistic development of two learners who demonstrated very different patterns of performance, both in terms of processing lexical items and verbal morphology.

This book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the initial stages of SLA despite some limitations in methodology; for example, the findings regarding learners' sensitivity to Polish word order possibilities are inconclusive because the dominant word order in the input was subject-verb-object. On a theoretical level, this work is relevant and timely given the detailed discussions of intake, saliency, and frequency.

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