



Teaching L2 via online classrooms with Comprehensible Input (CI)

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ABSTRACT

Applying Comprehensible Input (CI) to teaching a second language is widespread among second language teachers, especially those adopting TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Story Telling). Historically, CI was introduced by Krashen through his monitor model, which has been criticised by many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers as inadequate and lacking a requirement for the theory. However, Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) argued that the concept of CI has survived for forty years, has been used under different names and may be expanded in a new direction. In this paper, I will explore Krashen's input hypothesis, in which it has evolved and how the input which should be comprehensible has been embraced in TPRS. I will then share how I apply the concept of CI in online classrooms and incorporate it through cooperative learning and interactive activities.

Keywords: *Comprehensible input (CI), Second language teaching and learning, Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS),*

1. INTRODUCTION

Input is required in learning a second language (L2) and has been acknowledged in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. The L2 learner's achievement is influenced by the quality of the input they receive (Lightbown, 1992; Gass, 1997), both listening and reading, which should be comprehensible. Input is one of the hypotheses in Krashen's monitor theory (Krashen, 1982) which was introduced in the late 1970s and 1980s. According to Krashen, receiving comprehensible input is more efficient than conscious learning, the latter which was obtained from explicitly learning grammar rules. This model has undoubtedly influenced SLA research even though many researchers heavily criticised it as impractical, lacking evidence/empirical data and having unclear definitions (see Gregg, 1984;

McLaughlin, 1990; Swain, 2005; Gas & Selinker, 2001).

Despite the disagreement in the field of SLA research, which focuses on learners' cognitive learning, attention has been given to Krashen's concept of CI by language teachers who look for insight into the concept in their teaching practice, for example, those who adopt Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). The interconnection and interdisciplinary between SLA research and language education is paramount to building dialogue with one another to address issues in second language teaching and learning.

The condition of language teaching and learning is more complex after the world was hit by the Covid 19 pandemic, where we, language teachers, whether we are willing or not, must shift from the conventional face-to-face language

classroom to the virtual one. The interruption of the outbreak that has shaken up the landscape of language teaching and learning made language teachers worldwide take quick transformations, including those who have supported the CI concept to interpret how the concept is brought to the online classroom. Many teachers may feel unprepared for this change, but moving to online learning is inevitable.

This paper departs from all the debates on Krashen's input hypothesis and the sudden changes in the educational modes of classrooms. First, I explore the theory and the debates that have led CI in a new direction. Second, I analyse the interconnectedness between CI as a philosophical stance and the language classroom practice, especially in Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). Finally, I reflect on the application of CI in my online classroom, including some ideas and techniques to embed CI in the online classroom. I hope this paper will inspire second language teachers to explore more about second language theories as their philosophical stance and reflect on how the perspective inform their language teaching.

2. KRASHEN'S INPUT HYPOTHESIS AND THE NEW DIRECTION

The earlier idea of the input hypothesis is based on the acquisition-learning distinction, which is the fundamental principle in Krashen's monitor model. The difference between unconscious language acquisition and conscious learning, according to Krashen (1982) can be viewed from the two different processes in language learning. Acquisition, according to Krashen, is a subconscious process similar to how children develop their ability in their first language. Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language. This process occurs passively and unconsciously through natural learning. Children may develop the sense of feeling right or wrong in language expressions without being forced to learn the rules or grammar knowledge. Krashen suggested that teaching and learning a second language should be based on unconscious learning. Thus, the process of language acquisition does not require extensive conscious grammar rules or monotonous drills.

On the other hand, explicit learning is a deliberate process that happens consciously through formal learning with grammar knowledge and language rules. The conscious learning process involves explicit knowledge about the way language works. Krashen (1982) argues that it is a forced study and will not lead to acquisition. Thus, it was not efficient in language teaching and learning.

The distinction between acquisition and learning processes has triggered debate among SLA researchers. Critics particularly were based on the researchers' own language-learning experiences in which they were taught language rules explicitly, but they were able to develop their language competence (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). Since Krashen introduced his theory which included comprehensible input, he has already published many papers focusing on bilingual education, reading and literacy. However, Lichtman and VanPatten found that his work is less cited by SLA researchers. Further, Herschensohn & Young-Scholten, (2013) state that many SLA researchers consider their studies scientific with an emphasis on cognitive but do not make any connection with language teaching.

Despite the criticisms, many scholars, researchers and second language teachers have supported Krashen's idea, particularly the concept of CI. Krashen also mentioned that there is no communication between SLA researchers and language teachers. In the introduction of his book, "Principles and practice in second language acquisition", Krashen (1982) critiqued that there was no interaction between second language teaching theories and language teachers as a practitioner. Researchers conducted their research or wrote books about an approach to teaching, methodology, techniques, or concept of language acquisition based on literature. Teachers, on the other hand, did their teaching practices and activities without consulting an approach or theory, which was analysed and explored by researchers. Their teaching practice is based on ideas and intuition. Often, teachers did not use what researchers recommended, while researchers did research based on language theory without consulting teachers. VanPatten, Keating and Wulff, (2020) suggest that theories can further push teachers to think about their teaching practice.

Thus, language teachers should invest their knowledge in exploring current research and theories on SLA.

Some researchers have already made connections between SLA and Language teaching and learning (see Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). They indicated that the concept of CI of Krashen still applies to language teaching practice. Based on Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) observation, some aspects of the concepts have evolved and are still driving SLA research today, including the acquisition/ learning distinction, the natural order hypothesis, and the input hypothesis. The concept of acquisition/conscious learning distinction is not dying out but was formed under a different name. Ellis et al. (2009) has used the term implicit and explicit knowledge, while Housen and Pierrard (2006) have applied implicit/ explicit language instruction.

Another researcher who supports Krashen's concept that acquisition is more important than conscious learning is Schwartz (1993). Schwartz argues that comprehensible input can contribute to the growth of a learner's interlanguage system. Unconscious learning, as Schwartz said, does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules or monotonous drills. Instead, meaningful interaction in the target language is what second language learners need. Learners need natural communication in a low anxiety situation. They should be concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they convey and understand. The best method is not to force early production or excessively correct them but allow learners to produce when they are ready. In other words, learners should receive abundant communicative and comprehensible input.

While the difference in SLA research in relation to hypothesis and theory is good in their way, CI is not worth pressing whether it is reasonable as a theory/ hypothesis. The principles of CI offer a lens to illuminate our ways of various second language practices. Teachers have the creativity and freedom to interpret the concept, and I argue that it is the strength of Krashen's principles in language learning. Patrick (2019) suggests CI as a philosophically framed pedagogical practice in second language teaching

and practice. Rather than focusing on Krashen's model, theory, or hypotheses for which the scholars criticised as not being scientifically proven, Patrick (2019, p. 49) further suggests that “the principles of Comprehensible Input can be a complete philosophical framing of pedagogical practices”. This viewpoint has been adopted by language teachers who support an input-based language teaching method (Lichtman, 2018) called Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) to illuminate language teaching practice.

3. THE APPLICATION OF CI IN TPRS

CI, which is based on Krashen's concept, has become a vehicle of change and has brought second language learning and teaching into a new direction, as observed by Lichtman and VanPatten (2021). The massive grassroots movements of applying CI in their second language practice have occurred among language educators who have applied TPRS in language teaching practice (Ray & Seeley, 2008). TPRS which was pioneered by Blaine Ray in the 1990s is a unique way of teaching foreign language in a classroom setting to develop students' second language proficiency. TPRS provides a framework through interaction with an emphasis on comprehensible language input. Research conducted by Watson (2009) and Dziedzic (2009) found that students in TPRS or comprehension-based classes do well compared to traditionally taught students after one year of language class.

Another researcher who greatly supports TPRS is Karen Lichtman, who introduces an Input-Based Approach to Second Language Instruction (Lichtman, 2018). Input is indispensable for learning a language and must have a communicative purpose. Lichtman argues that input must be comprehensible and engaged through communication because interaction, paramount for all language acquisition contexts, will lead to successful language learning. Therefore, exposure over time to as much input as possible in the target language in a communicative context is very valuable. Besides meaningful contextual interaction, compelling is another factor that teacher should put into account. Teachers should establish meaning to lead learners to make sense of the words, phrases or expressions. In TPRS, input as the common thread is communicated through stories in meaningful

contexts. Learners communicate right away, even at the beginner level (Lichtman, 2018). Contexts such as visuals, gestures, and slow utterances would help students understand the language.

The input that helps students learn and understand the language should be the right level for the learners. Lichtman (2018) states that language acquisition depends on processing language input during communication. In the classroom setting, teachers need to interact with the learners using the target language they understand. If the input is too complex or too abstract for their level, learners might not be able to comprehend the messages completely. VanPatten (2017) argues that language is too abstract and complex to teach and learn explicitly. When learners learn grammar rules by practising and drilling without context, they struggle to understand many unknown words and expressions. This situation would lead to disengagement. As Krashen (1982) argues, teaching merely grammar without context but only analysing grammar rules is not effective and efficient in learning a language. The unknown words without supported contexts would be meaningless. Learners who do not understand the input will process it as mere noise. There is no logical reason why second language teachers should force students to learn for an extended period of instruction without putting the target language in context. Thus, contexts such as visuals, gestures, and slow utterances would help students understand the language.

4. PRACTICAL ADVICE TO CONDUCT CI IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Applying CI in the online classroom could be challenging because we meet students virtually and, at the same time, deal with technology. While we need to overcome the struggles and learn from trial and error, we also need to explore what we can bring all the new challenges aboard and keep the language teaching practice with us. We need to transform challenges into opportunities.

Despite physical distancing, I encouraged students to interact with me in the target language in my online classroom. To prepare students to understand and respond at the level that is the right level for them, I already made a list of words in English and Indonesian based on the lesson's

objectives prior to the class using PowerPoint slides. If the words were not on the list, I used gestures or features such as chat or annotate features in the Zoom learning platform to help students understand without interrupting the interactions.

Based on the survey after the first few lessons, I found that some students, especially those struggling with comprehension, did not want to be put on the spot. I slowed my pace and stopped to give learners time to process the input. I asked students whom I believed would know the answer to my questions. I found this strategy creates a kind of achievement and victory that boost the motivation to engage with the lesson.

There are three themes that I carry out to embed CI in second language teaching practice that is based on TPRS: establishing routines, reading, circling and pop-up grammar.

4.1. Establishing routines

Establishing routines builds a positive classroom atmosphere and encourages student learning growth. This claim is supported by Simonsen et al. (2008), who broadly identify evidence regarding the importance of classroom management. Preparing and facilitating engaging learning experiences are vital in managing classroom management in virtual classrooms.

Various strategies for routine classroom practices and procedures can be embraced virtually. One strategy is to use all the available features in online learning platforms. The features are an excellent opportunity to introduce the students to online language instructions using the target language while interacting with them. Expressions such as "turn on/off your mic or camera" can become a routine. The use of emoticons, gestures and visual aids can facilitate interaction. The annotate feature for replacing the physical whiteboard and the polling feature can be utilised for interactive activities in the zoom learning platform.

Another good strategy is to use calendar talk to establish routines and interact with learners about the day and dates of the lesson, what is happening during the week, whose birthday is in the week or the weather. Calendar talk, an input-based activity in TPRS with low preparation, provides abundant comprehensible input. Simultaneously, teachers have an opportunity to establish stronger bonds and

fantastic rapport with students. This activity is engaging because we can talk humanly about real everyday life and events.

4.2. Circling

Circling is the instructional practice of simply asking repetitive but not identical questions in the target language to check comprehension. Circling is essential to help students understand vocabulary and grammar in context. One of the strategies is to ask for details in numerous ways to build the learner's ability to process and respond to a variety of questions. Litchman (2018) suggests circling facilitates additional uses of the new language structures and keeps students engaged. One of the activities that many TPRS teachers use for circling is movie talk. Using video clips as visual supports that we could take from youtube clips or social media, teachers interact with learners to describe what is happening in the video using the target language with the help of the list of already prepared words. I often use a video clip with the volume off, especially for beginners.

4.3. Reading

After learners receive and comprehend abundant input from the contexts and stories orally, it is time for them to process written input in the form of reading texts. Ping-pong reading is a technique I like to use for fun reading activities. Students in the online classroom are paired, but I make sure that students understand most of the words in the text. I send the pair into the breakout rooms using the zoom learning platform. In each pair, one student reads a sentence in the target language while another listens and translates it into their native language. They take turns reading and translating to each other, just like playing a ping-pong game. One thing that we should bear in mind is that students will enjoy reading if the text is interesting to them and at the right level (Ray & Seeley, 2008).

4.4. Pop-up grammar

Unlike conventional language teaching, grammar in CI is taught truly short with the purpose of making the teacher's input comprehensible instead of explicitly teaching about a particular grammar point. Krashen (2003) argues that consciously learned grammar has limited use in language comprehension and production. In My

online classroom, I explain grammar when necessary or helps students to understand the story/context. Unlike a traditional method that teaches grammar rules and exercises in a de-contextualised sentence, grammatical structures are treated in actual context.

5. CONCLUSION

A theory could become information and transformation for language teaching. CI, originally derived from the input hypothesis in Krashen's monitor model, can inform second language teachers of the principles and the philosophical lens for language teaching practice. In other words, CI is not to be seen as something abstract that detaches from classroom practice. Instead, it should be viewed as a philosophical perspective that informs the pedagogical practice to enhance students' learning.

Embracing CI and engaging pedagogical practice is one of the significant ways to give a significantly positive result in the second language classroom, even when the classroom shifts to online mode. This paper delves into the beginning concept of input introduced by Krashen, followed by the evolving concept of CI, which has been embraced in TPRS. Finally, I share some ideas from the current online classroom practice by zooming out on CI as a philosophical stance in my language teaching practice.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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