Meaningful Teacher Talk: How to Effectively Provide Input for Language Acquisition

Mary Curran, Rutgers University
Janis Jensen, Kean University
Goals of the Workshop

- Develop a heightened understanding of the nature and sources of comprehensible input.
- Analyze simulations for features of comprehensibility.
- Identify the components of “optimal” input.
- Design an activity, focusing on creating comprehensible language and cultural understandings.
What Level of Comprehension is Active in this Sentence?

Martin dining room front door over main entrance partook ignited flames sanguine faces rebel Dean.

1. You have understanding of each word.
2. Perhaps, background knowledge creates schema connections.
3. But is this comprehensible input at the sentence level? Word level?
“A related observation about the $F$ distribution is that it is positively skewed, not symmetric as are $z$ and $t$. This is because $F$ is always positive: It is the ratio of variances, both of which are positive, so $F$ itself must be positive. There is no left-hand tail of $F$ because the $F$ distribution ends abruptly at 0.”

Observations

- In the first example, there was **no syntax**. There was no comprehensible input at the sentence level even though there was understanding of every word.

- In the second example, **syntax was present**, but a void developed of **word level meaning** not allowing contextual understanding of the paragraph. “It had something to do with…”
Can You Read This?

fi yuo cna raed tihs, yuo hvae a sgtrane mnid too
Cna yuo raed tihs? Olny 55 plepoe out of 100 can.

i cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclty uesdnatnrdf waht l was
rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid,
aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Unervtisy, it
dseno't mtaetr in waht oerdr the ltteres in a wrod are, the
olny iproamtnt tihng is taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be in the
rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll
raed it whotuit a pboerlm.. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid
deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.
Azanmig huh? yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorannt!
Could We Conclude…

- Just learning words does not equal comprehension.
- Knowing words is a prerequisite to comprehension.
- Context makes language comprehensible.
- There are multiple factors for comprehension.
We acquire language in only one way: when we understand messages; that is, when we understand what we hear or what we read, when we understand the message.
Is Comprehensible Input something done by the teacher to the student or by the student based on the teacher?
The Greater the Comprehensible Input …

… the greater the capacity to comprehend.
So which is more desirable?
The student who reads/hears every word?
Or
the student who understands the meaning?
Do Not underestimate the power of a picture.

The Heart of the Tulip

By Keith Pruitt
Connecting an image to a vocabulary word is the way in which the brain files information. Creating the visual representation is tantamount to creating the file in the permanent memory.

*Building Background Knowledge*, Marzano
CI Strategies

- Gestures, Visuals and Props
- Providing context
- Thematic instruction
- Student engagement and involvement
- Illustration/stories
- Graphic Organizers
- Collaboration
- Humor - Keep it interesting and fun
Let’s give it a try…
Task
Giving a Gift

Prepare a short activity designed to expose your students to the target language forms and functions and cultural practices necessary to give a gift.

Focus on linguistic and cultural outcomes.

Consider the CI checklist
- Create comprehensible language
- Create contexts for comprehension
- Create comprehensible interactions
Evaluation and Reflection

Turn to a colleague and answer these questions

- What language is necessary for gift giving in the target language?
- What cultural practices are necessary for gift giving in target culture?
- Consider the CI checklist. How well did this activity
  - Create comprehensible language?
  - Create contexts for comprehension?
  - Create comprehensible interactions?
Questions and Discussion

What are your concerns and solutions when helping teachers create comprehensible input?

How are you preparing novice teachers to create comprehensible input?

What works well in your student programs to make input comprehensible?