‘Just say it in English’
Making Language Comprehensible

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Goals of the Workshop

• 1  Understand the concept of Comprehensible Input (CI) and Interaction

• 2  Identify features and strategies of CI

• 3  Explore ways to check for comprehension

• 4  Provide a tool to monitor and assess CI
Research indicates that effective language instruction must provide significant amounts of meaningful communication and interactive feedback in the target language in order for students to develop language and cultural proficiency. The pivotal role of target-language interaction in language learning is emphasized in the K-16 Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. ACTFL therefore recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom. In classrooms that feature maximum target-language use, instructors use a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension and support meaning making.
What do you think?
Think-Pair-Share

• How might engaging in meaningful and comprehensible interactions in the target language support foreign language learning?

• How does the ACTFL position statement fit with your own teaching or the teaching that you have experienced or observed?
Why Comprehensible Input?

• CI is a theory of language learning dating back to the work of Stephen Krashen (1982).

• CI has made a significant contribution to FL teaching – “To acquire a new language, learners need more than hearing the teacher speak about the foreign language. They need to hear the teacher speak in the language.”
Why CI (2)

• Input is to language acquisition as gas is to a car. An engine needs gas to run; without gas, the car would not move an inch. Likewise, comprehensible input in language learning is what gets the “engine’ of acquisition going. Without it, acquisition simply does not happen.

(J. Lee and B. VanPatten, 2003)
Extending the Analogy

• Not all gas is good for your car. Refined gas is better than crude oil.

• Similarly, not all input is good for language learning.

• Input beneficial to language learning is a kind of *refined language,* modified and simplified in ways that make it comprehensible to learners.
General Features of Useful Input

1) Input must be **COMPREHENSIBLE**. Learners must understand most of what the speaker is saying for language learning to occur.

2) Input must be **MEANING BEARING**. Useful input must contain a message that learners want and need to understand. There must be some communicative intent.
Think of how children learn

- Children do not learn language on the basis of a confusing corpus full of mistakes, garbles, and complexities. Children hear, in fact, a consistent, organized, simplified, and redundant set of utterances which in many ways seems quite well designed as a set of “language lessons.” (C. Snow, 1978, p. 498)

- This is, indeed, comprehensible input.
What the theory suggests...

- When input is comprehensible and meaning bearing, learners can:
  - BIND forms and meanings.
  - REFLECT and FOCUS on how the language works.
  - INTERACT using the language in the input.
An Important Idea

If what we want our students to learn is not in the input in sufficient quantity and quality, they most likely will not learn it.
Analyzing CI: Elementary School

• **QUANTITY:** How much CI?

• **QUALITY:**
  How does the teacher make herself comprehensible and modify her input?
  How does the teacher check for student understanding?
Analyzing CI: High School

- What is the goal of the lesson? What is the teacher try to get students to comprehend?

How does the teacher create comprehensible input?

In your view, what is the quality of the input.
4 (useful)  3  2  1 (useless)
Analyzing CI: High School

• How does the teacher check for comprehension?

• How do we know the students comprehend the teacher? Evidence of comprehension?

• What would you have changed and why?
Compare and Contrast

• What differences do you notice in how CI is carried out in Dyer’s vs. Azama’s lesson?

• What CI strategies are utilized with elementary school students compared to high school students?

• How would you explain these differences?
• Putting it all together
  • Language
  • Context
  • Interaction
Creating Comprehensible Language (1)

• Create Comprehensible LANGUAGE by:
  • Paraphrasing (or saying it in an easier way).
  • Slowing down the rate of delivery.
  • Defining words by example, not translation.
  • Using structures students are familiar with and build on them over time (‘No talking over their heads’).
  • Using key words and phrases more than once (enter and re-enter new language elements).
  • Use tone of voice to emphasize key parts on the message.
Creating *Contexts* for supporting Comprehension (2)

- **Create a CONTEXT for increasing comprehension by:**
  - Using gestures to make meanings clear
  - Using visuals and props
  - Make sure students have knowledge of the topic/objective of the lesson
  - Provide a meaningful and purposeful context
Creating Comprehensible *Interactions* with Learners (3)

- Use active *comprehension-checking prompts*. (Not “*Do you understand?*” but rather “*Show me you understand.*”)

- Use *questioning sequences* in sufficient quantity. 
  yes/no > forced-choice > open ended

- Provide students with *ways to ask for clarification* and *confirm* their understanding. (*Can you say it again? More slowly please. Do you mean X?*)
A CI Tool

• This tool, in the form of a checklist, will allow you to:

  • 1) Monitor your own input and comprehension checking practices, and

  • 2) Use with other teachers for observation and feedback.
Your Thoughts

• Can you think of other ways to increase the quantity and quality of comprehensible input in foreign language classes?
CONCLUDING COMMENTS