

COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT, COMPREHENSIBLE OUTPUT AND ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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The famous “comprehensible input” hypothesis of second language acquisition (SLA), proposed by Stephen Krashen in the 1980's, despite being intuitively appealing to many language teachers and learners, has also attracted a lot of criticism by many SLA researchers. One of these critics, Merlyl Swain, pointed out some significant flaws in Krashen's comprehensible input theory and put forward an alternative hypothesis, which she named “the comprehensible output hypothesis”. In it she suggested that mere exposure to comprehensible input is not enough for a successful acquisition of a second language's vocabulary and grammar. According to Swain, language learners should be “pushed” to speak in order to successfully acquire new words and especially new grammatical structures. She based this claim on “the need hypothesis” according to which we acquire language only when we need to communicate and make ourselves understood. To this, Krashen famously retorted that “All the need in the world will not result in language acquisition if there is no comprehensible input. In addition, interesting and comprehensible input will result in language acquisition whether need is present or not.” Decades after this exchange the debate between the supporters of input and output as the primary factor in a successful SLA has been continuing. The basis of this presentation is an empirical study of more than 60 first-year students at Šiauliai University. Their experience of ESL input and output was documented in a questionnaire and this data was compared to their scores in a grammar test. The conclusions we received from this study are discussed in the light of the above mentioned input - output debate.