

Bill Van Patten on Comprehensible Input

(from an [informal discussion on Facebook](#))

CI is an acronym for Comprehensible Input. Input is language that learners hear, read or see (sign languages) in a communicative context. It is language that learners process for meaning (i.e., the learner is trying to understand what someone is saying, what he/she is reading, or what someone is signing). Comprehensible input is that part of the input that learners can actually make sense of, the stuff they can pick up and attach meaning to during comprehension.

CI is not owned by anyone, any theory, any context, or any methodology. CI exists in and out of classrooms. CI exists in both first and second language acquisition. Wherever and whenever language is used to communicate something to a learner and that learner can understand something, there is CI.

In general second language theory, the more that input is comprehensible to learners, the greater the chances are for acquisition. This is because the internal unconscious mechanisms that work on language acquisition have to be able to link meaning with how meaning is expressed in order for language acquisition to occur. That is, learners have to process language during comprehension in order for acquisition to occur.

Recap:

Input = language you hear, read or see in a communicative context

CI = is a subset of input that you can actually understand

The more CI = the better for acquisition

TPRS is one type of methodology that tries to maximize CI in the classroom (among other things that it does)

Hardy adds:

Research shows that the CI also needs to be engaging and repeated for the learner to actually acquire and retain the language. The ultimate goal is to have a critical mass of this input + desire to and opportunity to communicate in the target language.

Using acquired language to create messages that are communicated to and understood by native speakers = one of the most important outcomes of language instruction at CFB.