



Exploring Stephen Krashen's 'i + 1' acquisition model in the classroom

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ABSTRACT

Stephen Krashen's theories can appear 'seductive' to teachers of languages, in that they identify a seemingly clear way forward for language acquisition in the classroom. However, reification of Krashen's theories, in particular the notion of attaining 'i + 1' through comprehensible input, is demonstrated to be problematic. Based on empirical data drawn from an exploratory small-scale study in the north of England, this paper shows how an attempt at 'acquisition' that is planned and adapted from principles of 'i + 1' evolves into structured 'learning' in a format probably anathema to Stephen Krashen. It is concluded that Krashen's theories seem plausible but prove to be flawed and incoherent when applied in the 'real' languages classroom.

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1. Introduction

Stephen Krashen posited five basic theories in second language acquisition (SLA): acquiring versus learning language; the natural order of acquiring grammatical morphemes; the 'monitor' or 'editor' in second language performance; the input hypothesis; and the affective filter theory related to e.g. pupil stress levels and language acquisition (for full details see: Krashen, 1987, p. 3; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). As a former school teacher of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in England, I found Krashen's ideas particularly seductive in that they appeared to provide clear answers to the question of how I was going to lift the second-language (L2) levels of my pupils to 'i + 1', delivered through 'comprehensible input'.

However, in attempting to reify the input hypothesis, more questions were raised for me than answered. For example, it was not clear for me what 'i' means when 30 school pupils are sitting in front of me – is it 30 different levels of 'i', one for each pupil, or a collective 'i' that I am addressing? And in terms of '+1', is it 30 different 'shades' of '+1' that I am aiming to raise their levels to individually, or a collective level of '+1'? The overarching question is: What does 'i + 1' mean in practice in a real-life school teaching context?

In order to begin to answer this question, an exploratory small-scale single case study (Stake, 2000) was carried out in a secondary school in South Yorkshire, England, that saw a series of lessons taught that attempted to encapsulate the notion of 'i + 1' in practice. The study took place in an 11–18 state secondary school that I would describe as fairly average in terms of pupil backgrounds and examination achievements. There was not a large enough sample to generate statistical evidence; rather, the results form the potential basis for further research. However, I would argue strongly that this case study is of intrinsic interest.

In terms of my positionality (Wellington, 2006) and the context for this research, I have a joint linguistics and education role as a teacher–educator training future teachers of Modern Foreign Languages on a one-year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) program. In this role, I am still trying to identify how best to 'bring-on' pupils in terms of their foreign

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language learning, and how best to pass this knowledge on to my students. In England we use the term 'Modern Foreign Languages' to describe the teaching of, usually, French, German or Spanish, the main 'foreign' languages taught in English secondary schools.

This paper is set out as follows. In the next section, Section 2, I discuss Krashen's input hypothesis and theory of 'i + 1', as presented by him. In Section 3, I examine Krashen's notion of putting 'i + 1' into practice through 'comprehensible input'. In Section 4, the research project is explicated and the findings discussed. In Section 5, the concluding section, the question guiding this paper is re-visited, limitations are discussed and recommendations made.

Before embarking upon the rest of this paper, I just want to say something about Stephen Krashen and his theories in general. Krashen would appear to be a significant figure with a certain impact in the world of linguistics, as judged by measures such as his name recognition amongst colleagues and students, and his many publications and citation count. He has a certain resonance with a generation of school practitioners in England. However, he is also a very polarizing figure as evidenced by certain websites (e.g. Stewart, 2010). And his theories have attracted some quite strident articles (e.g. Gregg, 1984). That said, I would like to focus on the particular relevance of one aspect of his theory. I am not ant-Krashen, *per se*, but I am less than convinced by aspects of his theories when tried out empirically.

2. Krashen's input hypothesis

Paraphrasing from Krashen (Krashen, 1987), in the early years, children may acquire, rather than learn, their first language. From birth, babies, as a rule, are not subjected to regular language lessons in their mother tongue. For example, in England, amongst native (L1) speakers, nobody would dream of saying "Right, Sophie, now you are two years old let's teach you English!" Rather, babies and young children 'pick up' or acquire the language through a more *subconscious* natural process. This contrasts with learning a new language, traditionally an overtly *conscious* process (Krashen, 1987). In foreign language learning, one could argue that one aim is to replicate this acquisition process by teaching in the target language, thus providing 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1987). This approach was probably reflected in the proposals for the early MFL National Curriculum in England and Wales which suggested that the TL should be used by teachers and pupils as the 'normal means of communication' (Department of Education & Science, 1990, p. 6, para. 3.18). In other words, language lessons should be taught as far as possible in the target language (TL), not in the native language (English in this case). Of course, one could probably *learn* a language without hearing it spoken, or at least master parts of a language. But without the TL input, those further opportunities for *acquisition* are lost. This corresponds to the first part of Krashen's three-part input hypothesis: 'The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning' (Krashen, 1987, p. 21).

Acquisition takes place, according to Krashen, when we understand the input-language that contains 'structure' that is 'a little beyond' where we currently are (Krashen, 1987, p. 21). The idea is to go for 'meaning' over 'structure' which, as Krashen points out, may be counter-intuitive i.e. normal practice may see structures taught first and then applied. To understand language a little beyond current competence is facilitated, according to Krashen, by the use of extra-linguistic input, context and knowledge of the world (Krashen, 1987, p. 21). According to Krashen's second stage of the input hypothesis, 'We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (i + 1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information (Krashen, 1987, p. 21).

In order for language acquisition to take place, Krashen posits that the teacher uses 'comprehensible input' to facilitate language acquisition. He also refers to 'comprehended' input (Krashen, 1987, p. 33). And if the pupil is at a level that we shall call 'i', then the aim is for the teacher to raise the level of his/her use of the language to ensure that the pupil is receiving input a bit above 'i' and hence pushing up acquisition to the next level '+1'. This, then, is where the term 'i + 1' stems from: '... an acquirer can "move" from a stage i (where i is the acquirer's level of competence) to a stage i + 1 (where i + 1 is the stage immediately following i along some natural order) by understanding language containing i + 1' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32). The third part of Krashen's input hypothesis states that 'When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, i + 1 will be provided automatically' (Krashen, 1987). Krashen argues that, to meet the requirements of acquisition by 'i + 1' input, the message needs to be understood and, as long as there is enough of the language being inputted, i + 1 will 'automatically be provided' (Krashen, 1987, p. 21).

3. Putting 'i + 1' into practice

What does Krashen intend us to do with his 'i + 1' model and associated theories and how can these be applied in the language-learning context of the school classroom? In their book 'The Natural Approach' (1983), Krashen and Terrell reiterate the basics of Krashen's theories before setting out a chapter entitled 'Getting Started with the Natural Approach'. I suggest that the Natural Approach would be very familiar to teachers of MFL in English schools as it appears to mirror much of the communicative approach prevalent in many schools (Pachler & Field, 2001). As I understand it, and paraphrased here, in the Natural Approach there is a focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills; familiar topics addressed such as leisure, family, health and shopping, etc.; a focus on communication with grammar assuming a more secondary role; an emphasis on oral activities rather than grammar drills; and use of the target language, possibly as 'comprehensible input' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, Ch. 4).

Regarding language acquisition, and comprehensible input in particular, for what could be referred to as the 'pupil pre-speech' stage, Krashen and Terrell advocate a method akin to 'Total Physical Response' (TPR) (see Asher, 1969), whereby

pupils react to teacher instructions in the TL. Reacting to commands such as ‘stand up’, ‘turn around’ etc. demonstrate that a pupil has acquired the language (if he/she follows the command), but reproducing the language orally or written is not necessary. This ‘reactive’ approach can be amplified to incorporate more complex language and ideas such as the descriptions of people e.g. ‘Who is wearing a yellow shirt?’ (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 76), and responding to images e.g. a story-board of someone’s daily routine (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, Ch. 4). The issue I would raise is that it is not clear how ‘i + 1’ fits in to this method, nor how one is to borrow from this method to facilitate determining how to incorporate the ‘i + 1’ strategy in the classroom.

It would appear that comprehensible input is achieved through target language input, presumably combined with ‘repetition’. As pupils acquire language so they start to produce language, ‘interlanguage talk’ (Ellis, 1994; Selinker, 1972), that itself provides yet further comprehensible input. Although it is acknowledged by Krashen and Terrell that such input may be inaccurate, they argue that ‘... interlanguage does a great deal more good than harm, as long as it is not the only input the students are exposed to. It is comprehensible, it is communicative, and in many cases, for many students it contains examples of i + 1’ (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 97). In order for pupils to understand the ‘i + 1’ input containing language they do not really know, acquisition is facilitated by ‘context and extra-linguistic’ information (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32). As Krashen and Terrell explain, ‘Good second language teachers do this by adding visual aids, by using extra-linguistic content’ and

‘In practice, providing optimal input may be surprisingly easy. It may be that all the teacher need do is make sure the students **understand** what is being said or what they are reading. When this happens, when the input is understood, if there is enough input, i + 1 will usually be covered automatically. Other structures will of course be present in the input as well, but there will be plenty of exposure to the i + 1 as well as a review of previously acquired items’ (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32).

This is referred to as the ‘net’, a net of structure around the pupil’s current level, ‘i’: ‘the net of structure provided by communicative and comprehended input ... will automatically provide the “next” structure, or i + 1, even if the teacher or syllabus designer does not know precisely what that structure is’ (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p.72). The ‘net’ would appear to be key to providing comprehensible input but is not, I would argue, explained clearly enough to allow for replication in the classroom. It would appear to be an all-encompassing mode of ‘delivering’ comprehensible input to the pupils, not too fine-meshed or fine-tuned to fall into the ‘structure a day’ trap (see below), nor wide-meshed/rough-tuned enough to see students fail to receive language on and around their ‘i + 1’ levels. For example, Krashen and Terrell argue for ‘rough tuned’ input rather than ‘fine tuned input’ as the rough tuned input will contain a spread of language ensuring that ‘i + 1’ is covered, it ensures ‘constant review and recycling’ of language and it will be good for more than one acquirer at slightly different stages (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, pp. 33–35). But I for one am still not sure where the distinction between ‘rough’ and ‘fine’ lies, nor what this looks like in practice.

I would argue that a major limitation with Krashen’s theory is that it does not account for the reality that is the teaching and learning of MFL in the busy secondary school of today. There are certain parameters within which teachers are teaching and children are learning, imposed by, for example, pressures of time and the need to fulfill the National Curriculum, syllabus and examination requirements (QCA, 2009). Therefore, realistic time for any long ‘chunks’ of ‘rough-tuned’ comprehensible input is hard to find. This means that any attempts by teachers to work with Krashen have to be ‘shoe-horned’ into a full and busy teaching reality. And to do so would require a complete reinvention of a school timetable (typically, the secondary school day in England is divided into about 1-h lessons) and, in particular, how language lessons are ‘delivered’ to ensure exposure to large ‘chunks’ of comprehensible input. An example of something like this in practice saw Brown and Palmer (1988) experiment with what they called the ‘Listening Approach’, an attempt to operationalize Krashen’s theory of language acquisition with learners of Thai in Thailand and German in the U.S. This saw students undertake some 6–40 h of language lessons per week, but

‘[t]he 6-hour-a-week classes accomplished so little that we stopped offering them. Krashen has suggested that it may take a 2-hour dose of comprehensible input to get the acquisition process operating with top efficiency. The optimum amount of class time seems to be 6 hours a day’ (Brown & Palmer, 1988, p. 16).

This is totally unrealistic in relation to an English secondary school curriculum where pupils may receive around two or three 1-h language lessons per week. Furthermore, the ‘Listening Approach’ model requires, ideally, two teachers or more providing comprehensible input in the form of what can probably best be described as linguistic ‘tag-teaming’, something that would be financially untenable at secondary school level.

I would argue that a further limitation of Krashen’s theory is his rejection of the ‘structure a day’ approach to language teaching and learning. That said, he does argue strongly that grammatical morphemes are acquired in a set order in the ‘Natural Order Hypothesis’ (Krashen, 1987, p.12) thus seeming to support language programmes that adhere to this order i.e. *structured* programmes! The ‘structure a day’ approach I take as ‘shorthand’ for the traditional language course built around a textbook that guides the curriculum. Such textbooks act as building blocks, introducing students to the language, usually topic by topic, page by page, with the supporting or guiding grammar structures often summarized in end-of-chapter ‘boxes’. Students may be exposed to a page or double page per lesson, for example, hence the origin (I assume) of the term ‘structure a day’. For Krashen, this approach appears to run contrary to the idea of acquiring rather than learning the target language and inhibits comprehensible input by being too ‘fine tuned’. Students may not be ready for the next structure

or the next structure may not be at 'i + 1'. Yet Krashen appears to offer no realistic alternative in his basic theories of SLA, other than the almost long-winded approach outlined above premised upon large chunks of rough-tuned input by teams of teachers.

Having said that, Krashen then appears to contradict himself in terms of 'rough tuned' input when advocating the approach of 'narrow reading' (Krashen, 2004; Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gribbons, 2004) and 'narrow listening' (Krashen, 1996) as means of comprehensible input. Narrow reading is focusing in on one author or a series of books, for example, which, Krashen claims, motivates the language learner to read something that is familiar, potentially very motivating and provides comprehensible input (Krashen, 2004, pp. 17–18). Narrow Listening, on the other hand, is the repeated listening of recordings of people speaking about familiar topics. The listener can hear these repeatedly before moving on slowly from topic to topic. The aim, again, is ample comprehensible input, this time of spoken language (Krashen, 1996).

In Krashen's experimental research¹ into comprehensible input and reading, in conjunction with Rodrigo and Gribbons, the input for the 'Reading-Discussion' group is finely structured around topics including: 'traditions, social problems, unemployment, drugs, violence, personal relations; different living styles; "cities with charm," cinema; extraterrestrial life, and advertisements' (Rodrigo et al., 2004, p. 3). In 'narrow listening' he lists six topics that he experimented with, including (broadly speaking) family, coffee and cigarettes, sleep, music, language and ghosts that, for me, appear to present an argument against the wide-meshed 'net' for comprehensible input (Krashen, 1996, p. 3). Although the topics listed are, as he says for the narrow listening work, 'idiosyncratic' (Krashen, 1996, p. 3), it is not a great leap of faith to suggest that they could be supplanted by the traditional topic headings from a typical foreign language curriculum such as 'family', 'food and drink', 'travel' etc. Learning these would entail learning certain 'families' of vocabulary, grammatical constructs and structures not far removed from a 'structure a day'-type program. In other words, and where I have some difficulty following his arguments, Krashen appears to suggest that a wide meshed net of comprehensible input is the sure-fire way of ensuring that all language pupils will attain 'i + 1' in their language learning. And that the structure-a-day approach is quite simply wrong. But then, by advocating 'narrow' listening and reading, a term I suggest is somewhat analogous with 'structured' or 'targeted', he seems to be undermining his own theory. That incoherence is a fundamental limitation in attempting to reify his theory in the classroom.

The average teacher in the average secondary school within the English system can only pursue the finely tuned, structure-a-day approach in terms of the language that is delivered. A teaching approach that was based upon any form of linguistic 'net', no matter how finely meshed, rather than a 'structure-a-day' approach, would run counter to the accountable, targets-focused way that schools and school departments in England are increasingly organized to satisfy league table and inspection requirements (BBC, 2010; Office for Standards in Education, 2004). As an example, in England it is perceived as good teaching and learning practice in schools when lessons are structured around shared aims and objectives with the pupils (DfES, 2003). In other words, there will be clearly stated aims and objectives for each lesson with pupils knowing what they will be learning and why. Any lesson not structured in this way would be marked down as 'unsatisfactory' according to the criteria of school inspectors (Office for Standards in Education, 2004). This, again, militates against 'unstructured' comprehensible input.

According to Krashen, it would appear that teachers and native speakers are amongst the best people to help learners achieve comprehensible input; they would appear to be traditional linguistic role-models. If teachers (or native speakers) do not speak too quickly, or use overly complex language, and facilitate some pupil interaction and provide extra-linguistic scaffolding (mimes, clues etc.), the likelihood of a learner achieving 'i + 1' is more likely (see e.g. Krashen, 1987; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; VanPatten & Lee, 1990b). Although again, in principal, this would appear to make sense, how can teachers be sure that the language they are teaching their learners is 'i + 1' rather than, say, 'i + 2' or, 'i - 1'? With no effective way of precisely measuring 'i', or indeed 'i + 1', the likelihood of constantly introducing 'i + 1' seems improbable. It is this that forms the basis of the research: How can we successfully introduce the concept of 'i + 1' into language lessons to facilitate language acquisition?

4. The research project: strategy and methods

The intention of the study was to explore the way teachers could introduce new language according to the basic principles of the theory of 'i + 1', where 'i + 1' is reified as meaning raising the language 'bar' a bit more each language lesson. The study took the form of a five-week classroom intervention with one class at a large comprehensive school in South Yorkshire. The teacher conducting the classroom part of the intervention was both a colleague of the author and also the regular class teacher. This meant that pupils would hopefully feel comfortable with the process, thereby having little impact on their 'affective filters' where the acquisition process is concerned (Krashen talks about 'low anxiety' situations encouraging a 'low filter' e.g. Krashen, 1987, pp. 30–32).

The class was a mixed ability co-educational group of 25 pupils aged 11–12 (Year 7). They were new-beginners in terms of language learning timetabled for French twice a week, for a 1-h lesson each time. The actual intervention comprised the first part of each regular lesson for about 10–15 min (therefore, 10 interventions in total). Conforming to school and departmental requirements, the rest of each lesson had to be devoted to the ongoing planned syllabus which, in this case, was the topic

¹ I would actually argue that such research as reported in Rodrigo et al. (Rodrigo et al., 2004) is quasi-experimental *not* experimental. With such a small sample size (33 split across two groups) and the multiple variables to take into account, Rodrigo et al.'s 'experiments' are anything but.

Table 1
Research model.

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6+
Intro: Or1 Wr1	Test: Or1 Wr1 Intro: Or2 Wr2	Test: Or2 Wr2 Recap: Or1, Or2, Wr1, Wr2 Intro: Or3 Wr3	Test: Or3 Wr3 Recap: Or1–3 Wr1–3 Intro: Or4 Wr4	Test: Or4 Wr4 Recap: Or1–4 Wr1–4 Intro: Or5 Wr5	Pattern continues

of 'home and environment'. Assessing the pupils' general competence in the second language (French) informally at the beginning of the investigation appeared straightforward. The class seemed unable to either comprehend or respond to simple classroom language, which tends to suggest that the pupils had yet to be exposed to any extensive target language use in French, or regular teaching of French. This base level was treated as the initial group-level 'i' from which the study progressed.

The investigation focused on the acquisition of classroom instructions and their comprehension through oral and written interaction; pupils would demonstrate their 'acquisition' by understanding and following the acquired instruction. The intention was to build on the instructions by making each subsequent instruction a bit more difficult or advanced than the one preceding it, so conforming to Krashen's idea that '... in order for acquirers to progress to the next stages in the acquisition of the target language, they need to understand input language that includes a structure that is part of the next stage' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 32). Pupils were to be assessed on whether they could comprehend the language introduced, as well as being able to reproduce it orally, or in writing. Pupils were exposed to one oral and one written classroom instruction each lesson, to see which method, if any, facilitated acquisition. The notion of exposing learners to both oral and written input is espoused by VanPatten and Lee (VanPatten & Lee, 1990a). However, it is acknowledged that Krashen's input hypothesis is based largely upon oral, not written, input. And, as an extension of this, the written input could fall more within the *conscious learning* of language rather than the *subconscious acquisition* of language. However, Krashen's theory does allow for oral and/or written input in language acquisition (see e.g. Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 56). The research model evolved into an adaptation of Krashen's theory for the oral input alongside similar, i.e. 'i + 1' principles, for the written input.

The research model, in brief, saw one spoken and one written item introduced in the first lesson. In the second lesson, pupil comprehension of these two 'items' was evaluated before the next two items were introduced. In the third lesson, the preceding new items were 'tested', the previous items recapped, and the new items introduced, with each successive lesson replicating this pattern (see Table 1, above, for the research model over the first five lessons; Or = oral item; Wr = written item).

For each lesson, pupils were taught a phrase or expression which was considered a level slightly above their current level of acquisition. Krashen's theory was used here as a 'formula' for attempting to ensure that for each lesson the pupils acquired language considered to be a 'notch' above their current level.

For the purpose of the acquisition stage, 100% target-language French was used, without any attempts at teacher translation into English. For acquisition and comprehension to take place, it would appear that the learners need to understand the message *in* the second language i.e. in the comprehensible input language. It must be stressed that the whole of each lesson was conducted 100% in French, with the designated classroom instruction one element of an otherwise normally planned lesson.

Although one could argue that by teaching an 'instruction a day' the project moved away from what Krashen probably intended in terms of SLA, by 'embedding' the instruction of focus within the broader target language lesson, I would suggest that a 'net' of 'comprehensible input' was provided (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The interrelationship and distinction between 'structure a day', 'net' and 'comprehensible input' is not clear (Gregg is particularly critical of Krashen's lack of clarity: Gregg, 1984). I would argue that all input must be structured, even if the structures are subsumed within a wider 'net' and so do not appear to follow a 'structure-a-day' format. This is what I essentially achieved and it would appear that Krashen, too, has moved more towards the idea of structured input to some degree in his later work around narrow reading and writing (Krashen, 1996, 2004; Rodrigo et al., 2004).

For the oral intervention, each instruction, such as, 'fermez la porte s'il vous plaît' (close the door please), was repeated three or four times orally at the start of each lesson, whilst the class was listening in silence. Extra-linguistic scaffolding in the form of gestures and actions was used by the teacher to facilitate pupil understanding. The subsequent lesson introduced vocabulary slightly above the current level of acquisition, for example, 'fermez la fenêtre s'il vous plaît' (shut the window, please), where 'window' is, it is hoped, equivalent to 'i + 1'. This model was then repeated over the range of lessons. The full list of oral instructions appears in Fig. 1, below.

I realize that this list could be contentious and that 'linearity', or imposing a hierarchy, was not going to be easy. For example, item 8 appears to be out of synchronization, but the intention here, primarily, was to teach useful and appropriate language to the pupils, not just language tailored to the project (in line with ethical practices in classroom research: British Educational Research Association, 2004). Furthermore, does 'i + 1' mean that the second item has to be a little bit more

1. Fermez la porte s'il vous plaît (close the door please)
2. Fermez le fenêtre s'il vous plaît (close the window please)
3. Ouvrez la porte s'il vous plaît (open the door please)
4. Ouvrez le fenêtre s'il vous plaît (open the window please)
5. Levez-vous s'il vous plaît (stand up please)
6. Asseyez-vous s'il vous plaît (sit down please)
7. Rangez vos affaires s'il vous plaît (tidy your things please)
8. Comment ça va ? (how are you?)
9. Puis-je aller à la toilette, s'il vous plaît? (can I go to the toilet, please?)
10. Puis-je aller à la réception s'il vous plaît? (can I go to reception, please?)

Fig. 1. Oral instructions used (in order of lesson progression).

1. Ecrivez la date s'il vous plaît (write the date please)
2. Ecrivez le titre s'il vous plaît (write the title please)
3. Ecrivez les objectifs (write the lesson objectives)
4. Copiez « travail de classe » (write down « classwork »)
5. Soulignez les titres (underline the titles)
6. Ecrivez et soulignez le titre « extended learning task » s'il vous plaît (write and underline the title “extended learning task, please”)
7. Ouvrez vos cahiers s'il vous plaît (open your exercise books, please)
8. Ouvrez vos « planners » s'il vous plaît (Open your planners please)
9. Tu as un stylo? (do you have a pen)
10. Oui, j'ai un stylo (yes, I have a pen)

Fig. 2. Written instructions used (in order of lesson progression).

complex than the first? Or should it be longer? Presumably, it is either or both. But should the tenth item be a little beyond (+1) item nine, but nine degrees of difficulty (+9) beyond item one? And how, realistically, is this measured? I have taken a 'stab' at this, but do not pretend that to have understood Krashen's theory completely in this sense, nor operationalized it completely as he may have intended. But that only puts me in the same position as every other MFL or SLA practitioner and serves to underline further the problematic nature of Krashen's theory.

For the written part of the intervention, a separate set of instructions was written on the board at the start of each intervention lesson, such as 'Ecrivez la date s'il vous plaît' (Write the date, please), also at a rate of one per lesson. Pupils were given the opportunity to copy these expressions down in their books. However, no translation was given. Pupils needed to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the sentence from extralinguistic actions and gestures. The subsequent lesson then introduced the perceived 'i + 1' expression, such as 'Ecrivez le titre s'il vous plaît' (Write the title, please). Again, pupils could write the sentences in their books, but were given no clue as to meaning in the mother tongue. Fig. 2, above, outlines the written instructions.

The same caveat vis-à-vis 'linearity' and hierarchy applies here as with the oral instructions. There are also junctures where the step up may be perceived as greater than $i + 1$, for example from item 6 to item 7 and from item 8 to item 9. It may be that these are not instances of a step 'up', but of a linguistic step 'across', and may not represent '+1', but '+similar'. But from an ethical perspective, as with the oral instructions, a major focus had to be on the teaching of language that would be of use to the participants and fit in with curricular requirements.

Having heard the instructions spoken, or having seen them and written them down in their books, pupils were tested on their level of comprehension. At the start of each lesson, the teacher said the instruction associated with the previously learnt vocabulary. If the pupils were able to carry out the instruction after hearing it, they were deemed as being able to comprehend the instruction. If pupils were then able to reproduce the instruction orally, or in writing, after seeing the gesture, they were considered to have 'acquired' the new language. I attempted to introduce a safeguard in collecting the data: Those pupils that understood the instruction after it was spoken would promptly follow/do/react-to the instruction. Those pupils that took time to carry out the instruction or were overly hesitant, or appeared to follow the other pupils' 'lead', were not counted as having comprehended the new expression. After the end of the five-week period, the results noted were as follows in the next section.

4.1. Analysis of the results

In this section I discuss the oral results first, followed by the written results. Fig. 3, below, represents the oral comprehension and reproduction of the oral commands.

It appeared that pupils were successful at comprehending and acquiring the new instructions when they were modeled orally by the teacher. The graph shows that by the end of the ten lesson duration of the study, 22 out of 25 pupils (88%) were able to comprehend all of the instructions when they were introduced orally. For the first lesson, the instruction was only

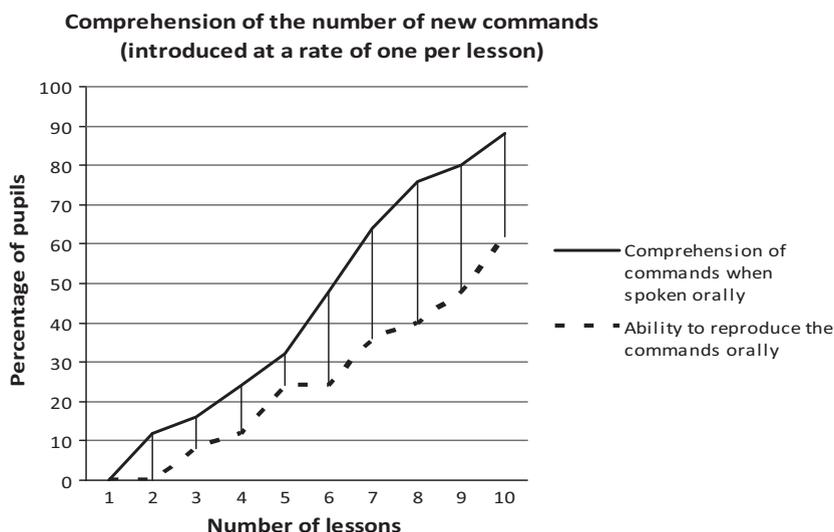


Fig. 3. Oral comprehension.

repeated and pupils were not tested to see if they had comprehended or were able to reproduce the instruction until the next lesson. This accounts for the 'zero' percentage value for the first lesson.

Similarly, the graph shows that by the end of the investigation 21 out of 25 pupils (84%) 'acquired' the 10 new instructions. This means that they were able to understand, *and* orally reproduce these new expressions. It took time, however, for the pupils to first orally comprehend and then reproduce the expressions. If one compares the two sets of results on the graph, a significant number of pupils could reproduce these phrases only after the sixth lesson, some time later than successfully comprehending these expressions. This suggests that pupils must first comprehend the new language, somehow 'digest' it, before attempting to reproduce it orally in a classroom environment (perhaps corresponding to Krashen's notion of the 'silent period' or, in this case, an 'inactive' period). The results also suggest that not all pupils are able to both comprehend and reproduce these new instructions in the same time-scale. In the space of 10 weeks, six fewer pupils were able to comprehend and orally reproduce the instructions. This suggests that pupils both comprehend and acquire new language at different speeds, with varying levels of success.

Pupils were able to understand the oral instructions at a relatively early stage of the investigation. The most significant increase in oral comprehension, however, came from lesson five onwards. It should be noted that the higher attaining pupils in the class were the first to start comprehending the instructions. The number of pupils comprehending the instructions after three lessons was fairly insignificant. This may have been due to the pupils having a minimal comprehension of the French language at the start of the investigation. Prior use of the second language was minimal in the classroom. Therefore, one could assume that the pupils were not accustomed to hearing the second language in the classroom environment. It would probably take time for the learner to get used to hearing unfamiliar sounds. However, I consider this part of the investigation to be a success; by the end of the investigation, 88% of the pupils comprehended 10 new instructions spoken by the teacher.

When analyzing the pupils' ability to reproduce the commands orally, the teacher would mimic the gesture associated with the action. After completing the gesture, pupils would raise their hand if they could say the action associated with the gesture. The teacher would not say the instruction orally. Pupils would have a time limit of five seconds to work out how to say the instruction and then raise their hands. Pupils would then have to produce the instruction. If a pupil faltered, or admitted they had changed their response after hearing another pupil, they were not counted as having acquired, or been able to reproduce, the language. It is acknowledged that a limit of five seconds may be too short for some pupils who require more thinking or processing time, but the attempt was made to conduct the research in as brief a period as possible at the start of each lesson, bearing in mind other curricular pressures.

The following graph (Fig. 4) represents the rate the pupils comprehended and acquired these new instructions through the teacher writing the instruction on the board at the start of the lesson. Gestures and actions were used to ensure pupil comprehension. It is important to remember that throughout this investigation the instructions were only written in the target language.

As outlined above, a new expression was written on the board at the beginning of every lesson; pupils would then copy this sentence into the back of their exercise books. However, no translation of the instruction was provided, instead, gestures were used in order to convey the meaning of the instruction. The following lesson, pupils were tested to see if they had comprehended the new language. In order for the pupil to be deemed as having acquired the instruction, the teacher would write the previously learnt instruction on the board and pupils would immediately have to physically carry out the instruction. Those pupils that physically carried out the instruction were considered to have comprehended the

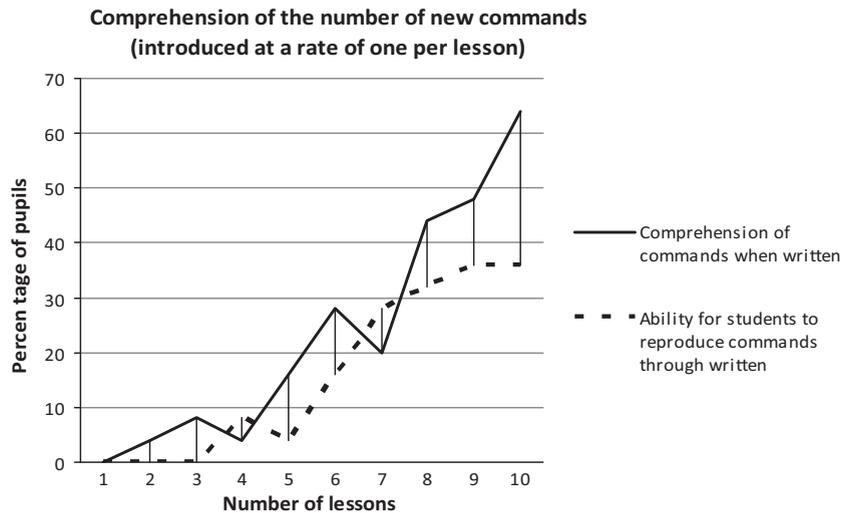


Fig. 4. Written comprehension.

language, those that faltered, or took too long to carry out the instruction, or that seemed to follow other pupils' 'lead', were not considered to have comprehended the instruction. As with the first graph, pupils were not tested on their comprehension or ability to reproduce the command until the second lesson.

In order for the pupil to be deemed as being able to reproduce the instruction, the teacher would mimic the action associated with the instruction. Pupils would then have to write the instruction associated with the action in their exercise books. Pupils were not allowed to look at the written instruction from when they first copied it down in their books. Those pupils that were able to write down the instruction, with minimal errors, were deemed to be able to reproduce the instruction in written format. Those pupils that were unable to complete the sentence, or wrote sentences that contained serious grammatical errors, were not counted as being able to reproduce the instruction in writing.

When analyzing the results for pupils acquiring language through writing, relatively few pupils were able to comprehend and reproduce these instructions over the first 1–3 lessons. Eight fewer pupils were able to both comprehend and reproduce the instructions at around this stage, a greater difference than acquiring the instructions orally. This tends to suggest a contrast between the 'success' of acquiring the written versus oral language. However, as the sentences were different in the oral and written tasks (see 'limitations', below), it is not possible to draw credible conclusions from this.

Pupils started both comprehending and reproducing these written instructions from the third lesson, although not at a significant rate. Only the higher ability pupils were able to grasp comprehension at an early stage, whereas most pupils seemed not to comprehend this new language. This tends to suggest that pupils of this age may find comprehending and 'storing' language through written communication more difficult. However, by the end of the investigation, 16 out of 25 pupils were able to comprehend 10 new instructions through written communication.

Only the higher attaining pupils in the class were able to both comprehend and then write the instruction in the second language. This acquisition was particularly slow, even for the most gifted of pupils. It took a good six lessons, over 50% of the duration of the investigation, for a significant number of pupils to start reproducing these instructions in written format. By the end of the investigation, only nine of the 25 pupils could be deemed as having acquired these 10 new instructions. Pupils may have shown signs of language regression in parts of the investigation. Many of the pupils found this task difficult, and were sometimes restless when asked the question. It was thought, then, that these pupils may have been attempting to acquire language above their level. If this is the case, then the phrases and instructions designed for the study did not conform to Krashen's 'i + 1' theory. Instead, the teacher may have attempted to teach pupils a level of new language sometimes superior to '+1', such as 'i + 2' or 'i + 3', at least from the perspective of the written input/output. It may be the case that aiming for 'i + 1' orally as a teacher is more straightforward than aiming for it in written language: oral language may facilitate introducing 'i + 1' by virtue of the language 'net' whilst the written sentences employed here were not contained within a 'net', involved memorization, copying and reproducing accurately and may have been simply linguistically more difficult. But this still brings us back to the fundamental problem of identifying what 'i + 1' really means to allow for such comparisons.

Pupils acquired these instructions by exposure to the language a little at a time. By the end of the investigation pupils noticed certain linguistic patterns in the instructions, such as 's'il vous plaît'. This is an interesting step in their language acquisition, especially as no 'source' language was used throughout the investigation.

5. Conclusions: revisiting the research question

I now return to the overarching research question guiding this paper: What does 'i + 1' mean in practice? In addressing this question, it is possible to draw conclusions about how effectively the pupils acquired or learned the French 'items', as evidenced by the classroom 'intervention' and data graphs, above. It is also possible to draw wider conclusions about Krashen's theory of 'i + 1' via 'comprehensible input' and the reification of these concepts. There are methodological limitations to consider in this study. Finally, recommendations about the use of 'comprehensible input' in the FL classroom can be made on the basis of this study.

5.1. *The acquisition of French*

For the majority of the investigation, the pupils showed steady increases in language acquisition. Teacher oral input appeared to be more effective than written input, at least over the duration of this study. This would tend to suggest in broad terms that Krashen's 'i + 1' theory, based upon comprehensible input, can be applied to the MFL classroom. However, it is difficult to judge whether the instructions the pupils acquired were '+1' above their current level of language. At times it was felt that most pupils perceived the new language to be a level above their current acquisition, evidenced by them engaging with it fairly readily rather than appearing to be totally left behind. However, those pupils that quickly acquired the new language may have considered that their level of language understanding was not increased, or at least by their 'i + 1'. What has come out of this study is a sense that '+1' for a higher ability pupil may be different to '+1' for a lower attaining pupil. Pupils that found the investigation challenging may have considered that the language was perhaps too many levels above their current language competence. In Krashen's terms, this could be translated as 'i + 2' or 'i + 3', etc. Aside from these complexities, the teaching of French 'items' with a comprehensible input and 'i + 1' strategy, appears to have been linguistically successful.

5.2. *Krashen's theory in the FL classroom*

Based upon this study and as far as building on a theory of how young language learners acquire new language in the classroom, a working theory could be centered on Krashen's notion of 'i + 1'. It would seem that pupils can gradually acquire new language at a rate that is slightly superior to their current level of language competence. The language that is introduced can follow a natural progression from the language they already have a working knowledge of. For example, an instruction such as 'close the door', can be followed by 'close the window', where pupils hopefully recognize patterns in the instructions such as the word 'close'. However, any attempts to put language to be acquired into any form of '+1 hierarchy', as I have tried to do, is problematic. The problems are theoretical and practical. In terms of Krashen's theories, although they appear straightforward and offer a way ahead for the teacher of MFL, reification exposes some major flaws. It is not clear what 'i + 1' refers to – is it an individual 'i + 1' for each pupil in a class, or a collective '+1'? Is 'i + 1' a similar concept for pupils of varying abilities? How does one cast a wide 'net' yet ensure language teaching and learning remains focused enough to satisfy school, departmental and curriculum requirements? These and many other questions remain and it is clear that more research needs to be undertaken. It would appear that I am still in the same position theoretically now as I was at the outset of this study; 'i + 1' looks good in theory but what does it really mean in practice?

In practical terms, the attempt to teach according to the notion of 'i + 1' did not take place in a 'vacuum'. There is so much happening in the languages classroom that needs to be considered and which cannot be factored out. For example, the pupils we worked with would all have had differing 'silent periods', that period during which language processing happens before 'real language' emerges (Krashen, 1987, pp. 26–27), and needed more or less time to engage with the acquisition process. Their 'affective filters' (Krashen, 1987) may have operated in different ways which saw some more ready to acquire the language than others and this could have varied lesson to lesson. Interlanguage (Krashen, 1987; Selinker, 1972) may have come into play, with some pupils' emergent linguistic systems developing ahead of others. In attempting to provide comprehensible input by repeating items in French a number of times, one could argue that the teacher was starting to employ aspects of the audio-lingual method (Richards & Rodgers, 1982), 'drilling' the items. All of this further underscores both the complexity behind the apparent simplicity of Krashen's theories and the impossibility of conducting experimental research in the classroom.

5.3. *Methodological limitations*

There are limitations to this study due to the problematic nature of conceptualizing and applying Krashen's theory and also due to the collection of the data which, I acknowledge, was not scientific. This was an exploratory study with the aim of attempting to introduce Krashen's theories to the 'real' classroom context and was never meant to be an 'experiment' conforming to the norms of experimental research. Therefore, it should be treated as such. Conducting classroom research into language teaching and learning introduces a myriad of variables almost too numerous to list (McDonough & McDonough, 1997) as well as possibly introducing the Hawthorne effect whereby the research act itself produces unintended changes in behavior e.g. a change in teacher approach may put pupils on their guard, or the presence of an outside university researcher may see pupils behave differently than normal (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Therefore, I would argue

that conducting experimental research in educational settings is nigh on impossible, especially if credible conclusions are to be drawn.

Attempting to address 'i + 1' from both the oral *and* written perspectives may have been simply a conceptual and linguistic step too far. As I have argued, Krashen's theories are problematic in relation to the concept of introducing language at '+1' of current level, and the reification of this concept. Attempting this for both oral and written language concurrently means that the research model may have been overly complicated in terms of the 'isolating' of the oral and written acquisition dimensions, the study of the findings and subsequent analysis. This was further complicated by the contrasting oral and written lists of items. That said, even if the lists were similar, I would guard against any direct comparisons between the oral and written processes. Subsequent research will see me focus on each skill separately.

The major methodological limitations of this study centered on the data collection and the scope for pupils to copy or mimic each other, waiting to see what the general response was with the classroom instructions and other items, and I realize that this would have affected results. It was also not really possible to assess accurately the 'i + 1' performances on an individual basis. An individual response strategy, such as mini white boards (Beauchamp & Kennewell, 2008) or electronic 'ACTIVote' systems (Cutrim Schmid, 2007), may have supported greater accuracy in determining just which pupils had comprehended which items, both oral and written.

There may be some criticism of this study in that people will point out, perhaps rightly, that 'this is not what Krashen meant!' To which I reply, 'yes, you have a valid point'. By attempting to 'teach' a sequence of classroom instructions, albeit with each new instruction embedded within a 100% French 'environment' and trying to raise the linguistic bar a little at a time (and that is contestable, I acknowledge), I have lapsed into teaching structures in a structured manner. I have not provided large, long chunks of comprehensible input. But as has been highlighted above, what is the alternative in a busy secondary school with 2 h per week of French? And not a 'laboratory school', I hasten to add, but a large, busy comprehensive school. So, at worst, I have misapplied Krashen, but I have pointed a way forward for those wishing to attempt Krashen's approaches in the 'real' classroom. It is clear that the elements of his theories that I have worked with are almost impossible to transfer to the reality of the classroom without transforming them into something anathema to his earlier beliefs. But this serves to add to the debate and, for me, is a strong argument countering Krashen's theories.

5.4. Recommendations

In light of this investigation, I would suggest the incorporation of more oral second language in the classroom – 'comprehensible input', if language acquisition is the aim. Activities and tasks could perhaps be centered on oral comprehension. When attempting to teach pupils new language it is suggested that vocabulary is repeated by the teacher, as well as having the class repeat the language a number of times – pupil interaction is vital. For pupils to successfully acquire new language they need to hear the instruction(s) over a period of time within a lesson, probably over a period of lessons. Pupils should perhaps also be given more of a chance to use this acquired language in the classroom, interacting with the teacher or other native speaker.

In terms of Krashen's theories, there is much work to be done. Much of what he advocates has resonated amongst practitioners, and probably still continues to do so. But any attempts to reify his theories, as I have done, underscore certain flaws, weaknesses and incoherencies that require further investigation. In particular, the tension between the comprehensible input 'net' and the 'structure-a-day' approach remains unresolved, as does the interpretation of group versus individual 'i + 1' and practical applications.

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