Revisiting Comprehensible Input, Output Hypothesis and the Use of the L1 in the L2 Classroom

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Abstract

The present study investigates three approaches to teaching introduced into practice via the research domain of applied linguistics: Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, and the use of L1 in the L2 classroom. The paper provides a literature review and relies on personal reflection, detailing the author's experiences as both a second language learner and a teacher in a higher education setting. The evidence presented herein supports the key proposition of Comprehensible Input theory, which is that comprehensible input is essential for language acquisition. However, it also suggests that input used as a strategy in isolation is not practical for informing the process of language acquisition, and so must complemented by Comprehensible Output. Finally, the findings relating to L1 use, support Macaro's (2005) recommendation regarding the use of the L1 as a facilitator to increase L2 input to optimal levels in the L2 classroom. The study recommends future empirical research; i.e. studies concentrating on the interlanguage of learners, and the application of Macaro's (2005) strategies in context through different learning tasks and activities.

Keywords: comprehensible input, comprehensible output, language acquisition, language learning, the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom

1. Introduction

Theories of applied linguistics regarding language teaching and learning were influenced significantly by Chomsky's (1957) original insights into language acquisition, suggesting that children are prepared innately to acquire language without conscious effort. One of the first theories to be influenced by this model of grammar was Krashen's (1985) Comprehensible Input hypothesis, which postulated that language learning only occurs when learners receive comprehensible input. This proposition subsequently dominated ideas about language learning in the mainstream and practices at private institutions. However, while the claims made by the Input Hypothesis were found to be supported with regard to language acquisition and learning, its effect on acquisition of the target language was only partial and seemed stronger in terms of receptive skills. This observation led to Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, which claimed the Input model was not sufficient to describe the language acquisition process, and that output must be included within the model of language acquisition to complement the learning process. The two theories combined subsequently gained favour among applied linguists, and further research supported both with empirical evidence (see Elley, 1991; Swain, 1991; Lightbown, 1992; Cho and Krashen, 1993; Pilgreen and Krashen, 1993)

The Comprehensible Input and Input Hypothesis dominated the practice in language institutions, changing language-teaching methodologies, and placing greater emphasis on the learner's role in the acquisition process and deviation from teacher-centred approaches in language teaching (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013). A third associated phenomenon observed among second language learners concerns the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom, which was welcomed by some as contributing to language acquisition, but rejected by others such as Frey (1988), Krashen and Terrell (1988), Chambers (1991) and Macdonald (1993) who conceived L1 use as impractical in the language learning environment. Cook (2001), Macaro (2005), and Harmer (2007) led investigations into L1 use; however, its efficacy remains much disputed in the literature. Therefore, this study will reflect on ongoing disagreements, and attempt to resolve a principled use of L1 in the L2 classroom in relation to language acquisition theories and the author's personal experience in the subsequent sections.

The present study will be organised as follows: Chapter 2 will provide a literature review and discuss the Comprehensible Input and Output Hypotheses and the use of L1 in the L2 classroom in detail. Chapter 3 will reflect on three theories in reference to my teaching and learning experience, and compare between different contexts where relevant. Chapter 4 will conclude the study, summarising the main findings and providing recommendations for future research.

1.1 The Context

The context of this study is the Department of English language and translation at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, where I studied as an undergraduate. I also taught there for a short period; hence, this paper reflects on my teaching and learning experiences as both a

student and a teacher. The department specialises in teaching a range of aspects of the English language, including linguistics, literature and applied linguistics.

Students graduate from the department after they have completed eight levels. These levels are classified according to learners' level of competence in English. Students who study between levels one and four are considered beginners or A2, as described by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Learners at this stage are taught basic language skills, such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. Students between levels five and eight are considered at threshold or intermediate level, namely B1; while a minority of students progress to B2 as they approach graduation. These students complete more reading and writing classes, and study specialised English courses, such as language testing.

Qassim University employs both native and non-native English language speakers as teachers. Native teachers typically teach learners at the higher levels; with few teaching beginners. Non-native teachers, however, teach across all levels, including the majority of the lower level classes. At beginner level, the teaching is teacher-centered, whereas, at intermediate level, learners take on more responsibility so that the teaching becomes more inductive. As learners progress they become more involved in reading and writing activities, especially in the drama and literature classes, where they are expected to complete reading tasks at home and write about them in class or discuss them with their teachers. The teacher increasingly then takes on the role of a facilitator; for example, offering feedback to students about their writing.

In the university, there are other language teaching departments; however, they offer fewer writing classes, focusing instead on reading in specialist subjects such as English scientific language. A comparison between our department and these departments reveals different utilization of the Input and Output hypotheses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Input Hypothesis

Krashen's (1977a, 1977b,1978) work on second language acquisition (SLA) has been influential since the late 1970s, and his ideas inform many ongoing research agendas (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). One of his main contributions to second language research is the Monitor Model, which was developed and described in a series of articles and books between 1977 and 1985. The model aims to establish a comprehensive SLA theory (Gregg, 1984) to explain the process by which a second language is acquired. Central to this comprehensive model is the Input Hypothesis, sometimes termed 'Comprehensible Input', which claims the only way to acquire a second language is by receiving comprehensible and meaningful input or through understanding massages slightly beyond the learner's current competence (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). If it is assumed that the learner's current level of competence in second language is i, then the next level according to the natural order is i + 1. The assumption is that SLA proceeds predictably. Moving onto each new stage requires exposure to L2 input, which consists of i + 1, so that is not too complex or far beyond the learner's competence (i.e. i + 2 / 3 / 4), but is sufficiently challenging (messages that are very easy to understand and mainly contain elements that have been acquired are represented as i

+ 0). The emphasis on meaning and the naturalistic exposure represented by the Input Hypothesis influenced second language teaching at a time when the behaviourist view, in which learning is seen as a formation of habits, already dominated second language teaching approaches, becoming one of the foundations of the communicative approach (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013).

However, the Input Hypothesis has been criticized as for ambiguity and imprecision. For example, McLaughlin (1987) criticized the Input hypothesis as having a circular definition; i.e. if learners receive a comprehensible input then this would result in acquisition, and if acquisition takes place then it is because of comprehensible input. This makes the hypothesis difficult to verify empirically. In addition, Gregg (1984) criticized Krashen's formula i+1 for failing to clarify whether i+1 leads to the next level of competence, or merely relates to the acquisition of a linguistic feature or new rule, such as learning how to use the passive voice in English. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the Input Hypothesis does not mean it should be fully rejected. White (1987) argues that while the Input Hypothesis is not sufficiently detailed enough and has some shortcomings, it can be very useful, if attempts are made to clarify it.

Regarding the evidence available to support his Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985) claimed that it can account for certain phenomena in first and SLA. One of the most interesting pieces of such evidence is Caretaker Speech (CS) (the simplified speech directed towards children by their parents). Krashen (1982) argues that CS is consistent with the Input Hypothesis and that it is crucially, not a deliberate attempt to teach the language. CS can be seen as successful in ensuring language is acquired with the assistance of simplified language, which draws on the child's current level of competence and introduces the next stage of acquisition assisted by extra-linguistic elements or the 'here and now environment, which supports the child's comprehension. He also advances additional evidence, including a comparison of teaching methods and differences between younger and older learners in terms of their language learning approaches.

However, McLaughlin (1987) argues that all the evidence provided by Krashen relies on his observations of phenomena shaped by his theory without adequate evidence to support it. Gregg (1984) also questions whether CS can lead to grammar acquisition in a child's first language, and asserts that in any case it has no relevance to SLA. White (1987) believes that the way Krashen associates simplified input with the Input Hypothesis as exemplified in CS, Foreigner Talk, and Teacher Talk might prove detrimental for language acquisition, as these forms of roughly-tuned speech from both natives and non-natives lack the complex grammar and content necessary for thorough language development. Other researchers, such as Long (1983) agree with the importance of comprehensible input, but place emphasis elsewhere also, such as on the role of interaction.

A principal claim of the Input Hypothesis is that output is unnecessary for language acquisition to occur. Krashen (1985, 1993) cites several cases in which language had been acquired without a significant amount of language production. For instance, in a case described by Krashen (1985), Richard Boydell received little education in writing, but was able to write his first letter in just nine days. Krashen attributed this to the input Richard had

received from reading newspapers, books and listening to the radio. Thus, Krashen (1998) argues that comprehensible input is more important to the language acquisition process than other language learning approaches.

Nevertheless, the above claim has not been supported by studies investigating the effects of output on language acquisition. Swain (1985, 1993) argues that output can facilitate SLA, and that students should be given more opportunities to use their writing and speaking skills. The investigation of immersion programme in Canada, conducted by Lightbown *et al.* (2002), while confirming that comprehensible input proved crucial to linguistic development for some students, found that the comparison group who had been involved in classes that incorporated writing and speaking exercises outperformed those students who received comprehensible input only. Thus, arguably, while comprehensible input is important it is not sufficient in itself.

2.2 The Output Hypothesis

The Output Hypothesis was advanced by Swain (1985), based on a study conducted into an immersion program in Canada. It is also sometimes referred to as the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis. Research investigating learner proficiency in this context led to the discovery that students who studied on the content-based programme were near native-like in their receptive skills (listening and reading), but their productive abilities (speaking and writing), were relatively weak (see for example Swain 1984, 1985; Genesee 1987). Swain (1985) attributed this to the limited opportunities the students were given to use their language in meaningful ways. She believes that output helps students focus on syntactic (grammatical) features more than input, and that this might also enhance their productive skills. When students receive input from their teacher, they can understand it using semantic processing, their knowledge of the world or extra-linguistic elements that do not involve much focus on grammatical details.

In contrast, Swain (1985) notes that when students are required to write or speak, they may push themselves to produce messages that are syntactically and semantically coherent, precise and appropriate, particularly if they encounter some difficulties communicating. This led her to conclude that input alone is insufficient, and that output plays a complementary role in SLA (see also Swain and Lapkin, 1995). Other researchers found similar results, reporting that output can assist learners in areas such as vocabulary acquisition and some aspects of grammar (see for example Ellis and He 1999; de la Fuente 2002; Izumi 2003; McDonugh, 2005).

However, arguably, opportunities to use language in a meaningful way are rare in classroom settings; thus, the argument that output can contribute to SLA might be deemed questionable. Krashen (1994) analysed studies that investigated the role of output in SLA, concluding that that there were few opportunities for these students to use the language. For example, in a study conducted by Pica (1988) only 87 possible instances of Comprehensible Output were counted in 10 one-hour interactions between natives and non-natives. Of these 87 examples, about 44 were cases in which learners modified their output, and of the 44 only 13 cases involved the modification of grammatical forms. Thus, the role of the Output Hypothesis in

developing learners' competence might be insignificant as it appears to be rarely present during the formal second language learning process (Krashen 1994, 1998).

Nevertheless, it is arguably not the number of the opportunities that present that is important, but rather the quality of the knowledge generated from learners' output. According to de Bot (1996), the quantity of the output is not a concern; rather it is the usefulness of the information produced during the output process that enables learners to examine the smallest details of the target forms necessary for fluency, or speed of delivery, and language acquisition. In other words, even a small amount of output can be effective.

This leads to the crucial and controversial question of whether there is a direct link between SLA and output. In a study conducted by Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993), they discovered that pushing subjects with prompts, such as clarification requests or a demand for the repetition of learners' utterances to produce the correct usage of past tense verbs "results not only in immediate improved performance but also in gains in accuracy over time" (p. 208). However, as Ellis (1994) comments, the evidence presented in this study was limited to the construction of simple grammatical forms. He adds that demonstrating the acquisition of grammatical forms requires the production of output that is more complex and more demanding; for instance, talking to different addressees in various sociolinguistic contexts.

Subsequent research seems to provide strong support for the importance of output in SLA. For example, McDonough (2005) investigated learners' acquisition of English question forms, and found the majority of learners who progressed successfully from level 4 to level 5, as measured in relation to the acquisition of this structure, were those who had responded to clarification requests and modified their output accordingly. However, while agreeing that output is important in SLA, de Bot (1996) states that the role of output in the acquisition process is an indirect one. He claims that the acquisition of new structures occurs only in reference to external input, and that output merely assists in the transformation of declarative knowledge, or learning, which requires conscious effort to be executed by an explicit memory, to procedural knowledge through increased practice and regular use of new structures. Procedural knowledge can be defined as having been attainted at the stage of acquisition when use becomes automatic (de Bot, 1996).

Finally, Swain (1995) argues that the Output Hypothesis has three important functions: Firstly, production enables learners to notice gaps and limitation in their knowledge, prompting them to develop further. Secondly, learners are able to test their hypotheses about language expression or form. Finally, being expected to generate output encourages learners to reflect on their language problems or discuss them. However, evidence from the literature suggests learners might not notice their linguistic problems even when they receive feedback. Mackey *et al.* (2000) reported that students were less aware of feedback pertaining to morphosyntactic forms, interpreting errors as relating to content or meaning. If learners cannot identify their linguistic problems effectively, then the supposed noticing role that is meant to accompany output might not benefit language learning.

This seems to be a persuasive argument. However, learners can be made more aware of their linguistic problems through prompts such as repetition of their errors. Lightbown (2000) points out that for feedback to be beneficial for language learners, it is important that

mistakes of meaning and/or linguistic form are explicitly identified as such. Thus, noticing plays a key role in the Output Hypothesis, as a method of raising learners' awareness of where their linguistic problems lie.

2.3 The Use of L1 in the L2 Classroom

The use of L1 in the L2 classroom has been much debated by both researchers and practitioners. Two key arguments have emerged from these debates: Firstly, the inclusion of the L1 in the L2 learning context has been encouraged by some, as it is argued that it can facilitate language learning. Supporters of this position include Guthrie (1984), Skinner (1985), Hagen (1992), and Phillipson (1992). The counter argument states that second language is best acquired through exclusive exposure to the target language (Frey, 1988; Krashen and Terrell, 1988; Chambers, 1991).

Supporters of the first argument perceive L1 as a valuable tool, with potential to influence L2 learning positively. For example, using the L1 as the language of thought when performing L2 tasks can alleviate the resultant pressure on working memory (Macaro, 2005), and can also be used as a communication strategy by teachers seeking to establish effective relationships with their students (Harmer, 2007a). Moreover, it can be used to increase or improve L2 production (Macaro, 2005), and to explain complex instructions (Macaro, 1998) or grammar (Neil, 1997). It can be also be used to increase the speed of the learning and teaching process (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989). Finally, it can be used specifically for translation tasks (Linder, 2002). In other words, the L1 has an enormous number of potential functions (Ferguson, 2009) that can augment second language learning. Harmer (2007b) argues that learners will naturally use the L1 with or without permission, and that it is inappropriate to forbid it; rather, its use in the classroom should be exploited and used systematically while maximizing L2 exposure where possible.

However, optimal use of L1 in the L2 classroom was until recently difficult to define, as research evidence regarding L1 use in L2 learning contexts is still not informing practise to a significant degree, according to Tian and Macaro (2012). For example, the findings of studies that have attempted to measure the extent of L1 use during teacher-classroom interaction in the target language have been found to be inconsistent. Some studies have reported L1 use ranging from 2% to 5% of the total teacher-class interaction (Kong and Zhang, 2005), while others reported 0% - 90% (Duff and Polio, 1990). These contradictory findings make it challenging to draw conclusions about optimal use of L1. Moreover, L1 can be used for a huge range of diverse functions in the L2 learning environment (Ferguson, 2009), and often these are very specific to the context in which studies were conducted (Tian and Macaro, 2012). This can make it difficult for teachers to assess whether the functions identified by researchers are appropriate to their own context.

Nevertheless, research does offer some basic guidelines for L1 use in the L2 learning environment. For instance, research investigating code-switching, or referring to alternating between two languages during a conversation, tends to be based on the assumption that code-switching occurs in the classroom as goal in itself, and that if this facilitates L2 learning and increases interaction in the L2, then optimal use of L1 is achieved (Macaro, 2005). Accordingly then, as learners become more competent in the target language, L1 use should

reduce or be phased out, as it is no longer necessary.

Notwithstanding the above evidence, there are several arguments supporting the notion of excluding the L1 entirely from the language classroom. One argument, for example, comes from Conservative Analysis (Lado, 1957), which posits a number of theories about transfer. According to this theory, where language problems encountered when learning the L2 derive from the L1, then L1 use be eliminated. For instance, English learners of French might encounter problems placing object pronouns in sentences in French because the grammatical order in the two languages is different; for example, I love **them** in English becomes I **them** love in French. The L1 therefore should be excluded in this case, so that learners can more rapidly learn the target language. This seems to be a convincing argument. However, evidence from research suggests that the two languages are interwoven in the learner's mind regarding syntax (Cook, 1994), vocabulary (Beauvillain and Grainger, 1987), phonology (Obler, 1982), and pragmatics (Locastro, 1987). For example, L2 meanings cannot exist separately from L1 meanings in the mind of the learner. In other words "learning an L2 is not just adding rooms to your house by building on an extension at the back: it is rebuilding all the internal walls" (Cook, 2001, p.407). If this is the case, then choosing to separate the two languages as an attempt to master the target language is likely to fail, as the two languages are interconnected in complex ways.

Another argument supporting L2 exclusivity is that avoiding the L1 leads to additional L2 input, which in turn maximises the time for L2 subconscious and conscious learning (Macdonald, 1993) to take place, giving learners more opportunities to experience the target language as an authentic means of communication (Halliwell and Jones, 1991). In the event that learners have difficulty using the target language in this situation, they can also develop their coping strategies further (Macdonald, 1993), and push themselves to produce more accurate utterances (Swain's Output Hypothesis), which might result in the development of aspects of their linguistic systems such as grammar (Halliwell and Jones, 1991). Permitting the use of L1 in the classroom could hinder this process.

Although this argument seems persuasive, what happens in classroom can be somewhat different from what researchers assume. Firstly, much of the language interaction that occurs in the classroom is not authentic (Cook, 2001); the majority is an exchange of information between teacher and learners, following the pattern Initiate- Response-Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). In other words, the teacher asks a question, the student responds and then the teacher provides feedback. Secondly, the topics, roles and functions of the second language discussed or practiced in the classroom are likely to be unique to the classroom environment (Cook, 2001), and so may not be applicable for language use outside the classroom. Finally, according to Dickson (1992) the quantity of input is less important than the quality. That is, even with a great deal of input students' language skills might fail to improve.

3. Reflection and Discussion

3.1 The Input Hypothesis

As discussed in Section 2.1, Krashen (1985) claims that language can be acquired through exposure to comprehensible input that contains elements of the language known at the learners current level and targeting the next level of competence; this seems to be true based on my own learning experience. However, when I learned about comprehensible input, I gained a clearer understanding of why I have not improved; that is, because most of my reading opportunities involved texts comprised of i+0 items, or previously acquired elements. However, texts such as Charles Dickens' tales did not benefit me either. These texts are difficult to process because they contain many patterns far beyond my competence (i+2/3/4), and a high percentage of unfamiliar vocabulary and complex grammar. The most effective reading materials for me were short stories and novellas, where I could readily understand 75% to 80% of the content. This kind of reading is the kind of comprehensible input Krashen (1985) describes as i+1.

Although short stories and novellas can be a source of comprehensible input outside class, English classes do not offer an effective source of comprehensible input for a number of reasons. Firstly, the time available for classroom input is too limited for comprehensible input to take effect. Learners need to spend a considerable amount of time reading and listening to English texts if comprehensible input is to have an observable effect. The time spent, and the amount of comprehensible input made available seem to be crucial factors for SLA. Secondly, it is only at beginner level that learners can benefit from teacher talk; in the latter stages of SLA, it becomes less useful, as teachers' rough-tuned speech becomes acquired, corresponding to the pattern (i+0) and not containing the pattern (i+1); this leads the learning process to stagnate. Thirdly, teachers use the L1 and allow students to speak in the L1 during class time. Hence, comprehensible input resources are limited to the classroom environment, where often only teachers speak in the L2. However, in literature classes, we were required to read novels at home then come to class and discuss or write about them, and this type of task proved highly effective in improving language proficiency. This is because when students spent more time reading at home, they have the opportunity to understand the texts sufficiently, and strive to do so to pass their final exams, which contributes to their overall English proficiency.

Gregg (1984) expresses caution over the capacity of CS to support grammar acquisition; he disputes Krashen's (1982) claim that comprehensible input ensures a child's acquisition of their first language, arguing that this has no relevance to SLA. However, my personal experience contradicts Gregg's views. As a beginner, my level of competence enabled me to understand approximately 70% of native speakers' utterances when they rough-tuned their speech. Therefore, Teacher Talk in class was a major source of my language development at the beginner level, but not at intermediate level. Over time I acquired the rough-tuned language the native speaker uses, so I had to look for other sources of comprehensible input to make progress. These higher levels included complex grammar, which is not usually used in rough-tuned speech, such as the present perfect future, which raises the question of why I was unable to acquire less frequently used grammar.

In addition, the teacher made no deliberate attempt to teach grammar overtly, he simply negotiated meaning, so comprehensible input accounts for the acquisition that took place.

This phenomenon seems to be very similar to the context of CS: when a mother speaks to her child she is not making a deliberate attempt to teach the language, yet the children produce accurate grammar before they enter schools and study it. Hence, it seems that the comprehensible input a mother provides is the only trigger for acquisition in the earlier stages of first language acquisition, which seems to support a case for SLA in which teachers deliberately rough-tune their speech to communicate with learners.

Finally, Krashen (1998) believes comprehensible input is the primary strategy for SLA, and that output is less effective. On the other hand, Swain (1985) emphasizes the complementary role of output. Swain's theory seems to hold more traction in the contexts in which I have studied and worked. In my context, those who studied drama and literature courses, which demand both input and output seemed to outperform students who only received comprehensible input focused on writing and grammatical accuracy. Research is necessary to confirm this personal observation; however, it does correspond with the findings of Lightbown *et al.* (2002) and McDonough (2005), who found that output resulted in improvements to students' writing skills and grammar. Research suggests, however, that both comprehensible input and output are necessary for overall second language proficiency (e.g. Swain 1985).

3.2 The Output Hypothesis

As discussed in the previous section, output can be seen to have a major constituent role in SLA. Swain (1985) compares this process to the mechanism learners employ to receive comprehensible input. She states that when learners receive comprehensible input they can understand it readily using semantic processing or extra linguistic elements. However, when called upon to produce output, their attention becomes more focused on minor details, which then improve their grammatical accuracy. This statement reflects what happened when my fellow students and I were required to write in drama and literature classes. However, this effect was most evident in situations where we knew the writing would be marked and contribute to final results, which encouraged us to more closely examine its overall quality. In addition, the teacher provided explicit feedback about the mistakes we were making in our writing, because without feedback we would repeat our mistakes. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that feedback will result in the acquisition of grammar, in other words learners might learn, but not acquire the language. Only if repeated feedback is given, in conjunction with continuous practice, can grammar be acquired. This resonates with de Bot's (1996) argument that output does not result in direct acquisition, but rather acquisition occurs with continuous practice. Thus, for the output process to effect SLA, the conditions noted above must be met, otherwise no improvements in learners' productive skills will be noted.

Another important argument can be made regarding the frequency of output in the second language learning environment. Krashen (1994, 1998) undermines the role of output in SLA because it is infrequent in an L2 learning situation. In the context in which I was studying, it appeared that the quantity of the output was unrelated to its beneficial role in SLA. Writing once or twice weekly in drama and literature courses resulted in a significant difference to my competence in terms of grammar, writing quality and speed. During the writing process,

learners think differently than they do when receiving comprehensible input, as the process involves thinking about how to write correct sentences and how to produce appropriate expressions and vocabulary. This enables learners to identify the gaps and limitations in their knowledge, which in turn forces them to look for ways to enhance them, which in turn contributes to SLA. Comprehensible input alone does not prompt learners to do this, and the gaps and limitations in their linguistic knowledge therefore remain relatively intact. Consequently, volume of output does not result in SLA; rather, it is the output process itself that complements the role of input in SLA.

However, in agreement with de Bot (1996), output does not directly cause acquisition. Direct acquisition and learning appear to take place only as a result of comprehensible input. Learners utilize the language they have acquired, in other words procedural knowledge, and the language they have learned, or declarative knowledge, in the output process. Learners cannot generate new knowledge without exposure to it. For instance, in one of the writing classes in my context, feedback was given concerning learners' mistakes in an assignment; these mistakes were identified first by reading them so that comprehensible input was provided first; the second draft was then written with necessary changes included. Hence, we used language we had learned previously through the input process, and with regular use of the learned language and additional practice, it became an acquired language; however, we continued to make mistakes with learned structures that were not frequently practiced. Hence, this seems to support the theory that the role of output in SLA relates only to transforming learned structures, or declarative knowledge, into procedural knowledge or acquired language.

3.3 The Use of the L1 in the L2 Classroom

The inclusion of L1 in the L2 classroom at the department of English, Qassim University, has been both beneficial and detrimental. At beginner level, where learners most need to use the L1, it seems to be effective. Teachers and students at this stage use it for three main purposes: as a communication strategy between teacher and students; secondly, to teach complex grammar; and finally, to explain complex instructions and procedures, so that students can accomplish tasks in classroom. Although teachers overuse it for these purposes, it could be argued that L1 use at this stage of language learning is somewhat beneficial.

However, as students progress to higher levels, the L1 continues to be used even if students can communicate using the target language. They still find it easier; especially when completing cognitively demanding tasks. Teachers are not restricted to rules regarding the use of the L1, so they do what they imagine will suit learners. For example, in the SLA course at level 7, the teacher used the L1 to explain theories when students fail to understand them adequately using the target language. Learners' dependency on L1 use in the L2 classroom, and teachers' willingness to use it has created a classroom in which the L1 predominates classroom activities. Only in classes taught by native speakers do students use the target language to communicate all the time.

Given these conditions, exclusive use of the target language might be inappropriate in the author's context, especially for beginner level learners, and for teachers struggling to explain

complex procedures or grammar, or unable to use the L2 effectively for communication. On the other hand, un-systematic use of the L1 is unlikely to be effective. The principled use of L1, as suggested by Harmer (2007b) seems reasonable to some extent. However, it is somewhat difficult to apply, because teachers and learners are often unaware how much or when they are using it. In addition, considering the huge range of functions that the L1 can fulfil in classrooms, there is a greater probability that creating an L2 environment might fail. There is a risk that teachers will over-use the L1 at the expense of using the L2.

The view that seems most applicable to my context is Macaro's (2005) recommendation that L1 be used only to facilitate interaction in the L2, and that it should be gradually removed after the learners' L2 proficiency increases. This then restricts L1 use to a minimum and increases L2 exposure. In addition, the point at which it is helpful to use the L1 should be specified, to inform teachers about the optimal use of L1 in the L2 learning environment.

4. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed two theories in applied linguistics and scope for the use of L1 in the L2 classroom. Drawing on my own learning teaching and learning experience in a context where English is taught as a foreign language, I suggest the following in relation to the three approaches to language teaching evaluated herein:

Firstly, offering comprehensible input is important for language acquisition, especially for developing receptive skills; but it is not sufficient in isolation. It must be complemented by comprehensible output. This means an effective language learning environment should include activities that include the practice of receptive and productive skills. This resonates with the findings of Swain (1985), Lightbown *et al.* (2002) and McDonough (2005), who also expressed this view.

Secondly, the findings of this research contradict Krashen's (1994, 1998) claims that quantity of output as compared to input offers evidence of the lesser efficacy of comprehensible output in the process of language acquisition. The number of productive activities in the studied setting were relatively few, but the overall language proficiency of students who engaged in them was enhanced compared to students who received input only.

Thirdly, even though output is an important process in language acquisition, it does not result in direct language acquisition, and so comprehensible input is necessary.

Finally, the most useful conclusion for practitioners in the study setting is that L1 use should be to facilitate and enhance L2 communication, as a strategy to resort to rather than a routinely used option. The evidence found in this research argues that the use of L1 cannot be controlled easily, and that optimal use of L1 is relatively difficult to define and model.

5. Direction for Future Research

The observations made in this study are based on my personal experience as a learner of the second language and as a teacher in a university setting. Empirical research supporting the findings of these personal observations is essential to understand this and similar contexts. It would be beneficial if any future research were narrowed to concentrate on the development

of interlanguage of second language learners, to provide concrete evidence of how learners acquire certain features relative to the different approaches to language acquisition followed in the classroom.

The efficacy of L1 use in the L2 classroom might also prove an interesting angle for future research, which could seek to ascertain how L1 use might be introduced through different learning tasks and activities, such as translation, dictionary use, and metacognitive strategy formulation in the second language learning environment.

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