

## CHAPTER THREE

# Input: Creating a Language-Rich Learning Environment

## Introduction

For many students who are learning a foreign language, there may be little opportunity to access the language outside of the classroom. This is usually because they are learning this language in an environment where it isn't commonly spoken and because there

are no links to the language in their family background. For other students, the language they are learning may be part of their cultural heritage, meaning they have had some previous exposure to it through family members. In recent years, with the development of technology, communication across space and cultures is now possible in a way that it wasn't in the past. Yet, even so, it will

often be necessary for the teacher to facilitate these opportunities in order for students to be able to take advantage of them. This chapter focuses, then, on how the teacher can create an optimal environment for language learning. It is exactly because of the reduced opportunities for learners to access the language outside of the classroom that what happens in the classroom assumes even greater importance.

## The Importance of Input

To learn a language, students need input. By input we mean language that is available to them, anything that they can see (read) or

### Input Hypothesis

One of the first researchers to highlight the importance of input was Stephen Krashen (1985). His Input Hypothesis has had considerable influence on thinking about language learning. He argues that 'comprehensible input' is both necessary and sufficient for language learning.

Today many researchers see the notion that input is 'sufficient' as rather limiting (for example, it does not allow any role for 'output' in the language learning process) but few would deny the importance of input in the language learning process.

Output is production of oral or written language.

hear. This input is necessary because it constitutes the data that they process for language learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Gass (1997, p. 1) claims that input is ‘the single most important concept of language acquisition’. The premise is that no learning can take place without access to language input.

Students don’t just need any quantity of input – they need large amounts of it. There is wide acknowledgement of this in the research literature. In his list of ten principles of effective instructed language learning, Ellis (2005, p. 38) includes input:

‘Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input’.

Similarly, Lightbown (2014) notes that the learner, in order to gain proficiency, requires thousands of hours of exposure and engagement. Children learning their first language have precisely these conditions for acquisition. Estimates are that by the age of 4, a child has had tens of thousands of hours of exposure to their first language! It is not hard to see that by comparison, the learner in the language classroom is at a disadvantage.

In the school environment the time allocated to learning a language may be similar to that of any other subject (or in some schools, even less). Content is determined by curriculum priorities and tradition, rather than by a consideration of what would be best from a pedagogical point of view (Stern, 1985). So, in other words, decisions about the time allocated to language learning are not typically made according to what learners might need in order to obtain a reasonable level of proficiency, much less what they might need to become fluent speakers. In a review of studies, Collins and Muñoz (2016) suggest that it is still typical for foreign languages in many contexts to be taught in brief lessons several times a week and that outside of these lessons, learners may rarely be exposed to the language (Lightbown, 2014). Allowing only a couple of hours per week for language learning has been termed the ‘drip-feed’ approach (Stern, 1985), yet it remains the reality for many. This is concerning, because it is widely accepted that there is a strong relationship between the amount of exposure to language, and learning outcomes. Insufficient time is likely to impact negatively on language learning success.

### Usage-Based Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Language learning is primarily based on the linguistic input that learners receive. Constructions such as 'good + (time of day)' emerge gradually as the learner's language system processes exemplar after exemplar from this input. The system takes into consideration how frequent the exemplar is, what kind of words and phrases it occurs with, and so on.

Over time the patterns, or models, for how a particular aspect of language should be used are established in a learner's developing language system.

(N. Ellis & Wulff, 2015)

Exposure to phrases such as  
'good morning'  
'good evening'  
'good afternoon'  
helps to build up patterns in language.

The reason that the amount of input in language learning is so important is that it is believed that learning takes place incrementally as learners are exposed to input over and over again. Each time a learner is exposed to a word, or a linguistic item in input, a connection is potentially reinforced in the learner's developing language system. To give a simple example, a beginner learner of English will often hear the phrase 'how are you?' so that, before long, when they hear the word 'how ...' in a context when they are being greeted by someone, they will know that 'are you?' will most likely follow. When this happens, the words in this phrase have been 'chunked' or associated together in their developing language system enough for them to be able to anticipate it. This process is explained by a 'usage-based' theory of language learning, that is, the more language is used, the more automatic it becomes. This is a theory that is also used to describe how learning in general takes place, not just language learning.

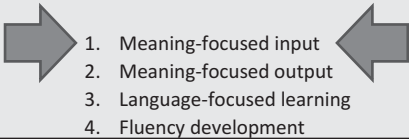
Another important reason for exposing learners to lots of language input is that comprehension of language precedes production. Comprehension provides the main source of learning required for language production (Keenan & MacWhinney, 1987). In other words, learning vocabulary items or new aspects of grammar does not start with the production of these forms, but rather with attending to them and understanding them in language input. In fact, for some learners, there is an initial reluctance to produce language, documented in the research literature (Saville-Troike, 1988) as a 'silent period', that is, a time when they acquire language through input only, and are not ready to engage in language output.

We talked to Margaret, a teacher of French to Year 11 students. She felt that there is not always enough emphasis on the importance of exposing students to language input. With reference to an in-service course she had been involved in, she said:

[It is] important for students to have lots and lots of input. And I felt that sometimes on the [in-service] course we were concentrating a lot on output at the expense of input.

### Nation's Four Strands

Nation (2007) argues that a well-balanced language course should consist of four roughly equal strands:

- 
1. Meaning-focused input
  2. Meaning-focused output
  3. Language-focused learning
  4. Fluency development

As we have mentioned, according to Paul Nation (2007), exposure to meaning-focused input should make up approximately one quarter of a teaching programme. Meaning-focused input refers to spoken or written input where the learner attends to the message or ideas being communicated (i.e. attends to *what* is being expressed rather than just to *how* it is being expressed).

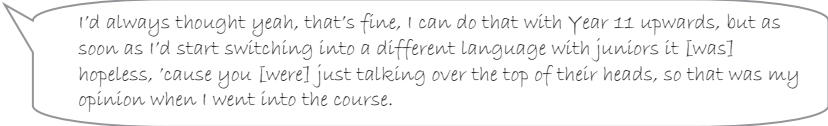
Nation has written this as a general guide for all language learning contexts; it could be argued, perhaps, that there should be a greater emphasis on input (receptive ability in a language) and less emphasis on output (productive ability) at beginning stages of language learning. This would be the case especially in environments where there is little access to the language outside of the classroom and because, as we have seen, it is from learning to comprehend input that students will build up the language resources that they need for producing language output.

## Maximising Target Language Input in the Language Classroom: Teacher Talk

In order to 'drive' language learning, one very important and powerful way that teachers may maximise learner exposure to input is through *teacher talk*. That is, they will use the target language as much as possible

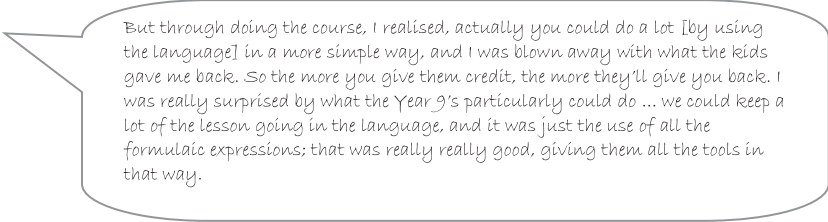
in the classroom. In this way, the language becomes the medium as well as the object of instruction (Ellis, 2005).

For some, it might seem that this is not possible, especially with younger or beginner learners. Linda, a highly experienced teacher of both French and Spanish, explains how initially she would use the target language in the classroom only with her more proficient Year 11 learners, those who had been learning the language for 2 to 3 years. She explains what happened when she tried to use the target language in the classroom with her juniors:



I'd always thought yeah, that's fine, I can do that with Year 11 upwards, but as soon as I'd start switching into a different language with juniors it [was] hopeless, 'cause you [were] just talking over the top of their heads, so that was my opinion when I went into the course.

However, Linda later explains what happened when, thanks to the learning that she did during an in-service course she was attending, she was encouraged to use target language with her junior students.



But through doing the course, I realised, actually you could do a lot [by using the language] in a more simple way, and I was blown away with what the kids gave me back. So the more you give them credit, the more they'll give you back. I was really surprised by what the Year 9's particularly could do ... we could keep a lot of the lesson going in the language, and it was just the use of all the formulaic expressions; that was really really good, giving them all the tools in that way.

This is a good example of how Linda's lower expectations, that is, thinking that they were not capable of using the target language much, had initially limited her students. In Chapter 1, we discussed how powerful high school teacher expectations can be in enabling students to succeed (Rubie-Davies, 2007, 2014). Linda explains that it was through using '*formulaic expressions*' or formulaic language with her students that she was able to sustain the practice of using the target language in the classroom. Once her students had learnt to understand this formulaic language, they had the 'tools' that they needed in order to be able to understand when she spoke in the target language. Formulaic language is language that is used repeatedly or a lot in everyday communication. It can consist of short phrases as well as single words. For example, some of the formulaic

language that Jessica and Nicole used in their French and Spanish classrooms (as we will see in Examples 3.1 and 3.2) were:

French		Spanish	
écoutez s'il vous plaît	please listen	cerrar la puerta	close the door
fini?	finished?	silencio por favor	quiet please
pas fini?	not finished?	gracias, muy bien	thank you, very good
continuez	carry on	primero . . . luego	first . . . then

These formulaic expressions were associated with the classroom routines that these teachers had established in their classrooms as a way of managing the learning context. The learners heard these expressions repeatedly. They also heard them in a context that helped them understand them, because they were familiar with the procedures and processes that were typical of their classroom, and so they knew what to expect. Using formulaic language for classroom routines, therefore, is a very powerful way in which learners can be exposed to input. This is further demonstrated in Examples 3.1 and 3.2.

**Example 3.1** (Year 9 students of French)

	Translation	Comment
Alison, qu'est-ce que tu fais avec ton portable? Dans ton sac, ok, oui.	Alison, what are you doing with your phone? [Put it] In your bag, ok, yes.	Teacher addresses Alison only
Ok, écoutez s'il vous plaît. Fini? Pas fini? Continuez, oui.	Ok, listen please. Finished? Not finished? Carry on then, yes.	Teacher addresses the whole class

**Example 3.2** (Year 10 students of Spanish)

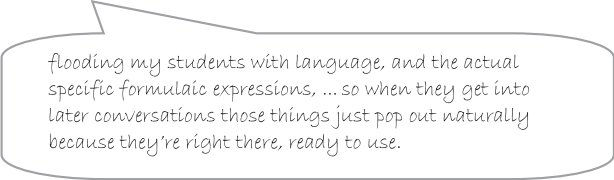
Bueno, silencio por favor, chicas, gracias. Vamos a empezar. Ah Leah, puedes cerrar la puerta? Gracias muy bien. Bueno, chicas. Hoy vamos a continuar con las compras en el supermercado. Y primero vamos a practicar los números un poco más; luego vamos a hacer una actividad en pareja, ah bueno, en grupo de cuatro, haciendo las compras.	Good, silence, please girls. We are going to start. Oh Leah, could you please close the door. Good thank you. Right, girls. Today we are going to continue with practising shopping in the supermarket. And first we are going to practise numbers a bit more; then we are going to do an activity, buying things, in pairs, oh ok, in groups of four.
---	--

In Example 3.2, taken from Nicole's Year 10 classroom, we see another type of formulaic expression, that is, a language chunk that can be used to combine with other phrases to communicate a wide range of meanings. Nicole uses the phrase 'vamos a...' in many different ways:

'Vamos a empezar'/we are going to begin; 'vamos a continuar' ... /we are going to continue ... / 'vamos a practicar' ... /we are going to practise ...

It is obvious that the phrase 'vamos a' is one that is often used in Spanish and thus very useful for beginner learners to understand (and learn to use). From this short extract we can see that Nicole's students hear this 'chunk' used repeatedly and in a context that helps them to understand it. At the beginning of a lesson, due to the routines that they have learnt to be familiar with, Nicole's students will expect her to be telling them about their goals for the lesson. This will help them consolidate the meaning of 'vamos a ...' Researchers also believe that, through being exposed to such formulaic language, students can 'extract patterns' from language and learn how the structure or grammar of the language works (N. Ellis, 1996). For example, students might just learn 'vamos a empezar'/'we are going to start', as a 'chunk' at first. Later, as they hear other examples of phrases with 'vamos' ('vamos a continuar'/'vamos a practicar') they might learn that 'vamos' is followed by 'a' plus a verb, and they might understand this incidentally without needing it to be pointed out to them, and even begin to use 'vamos' themselves with other verbs to communicate their own meanings.

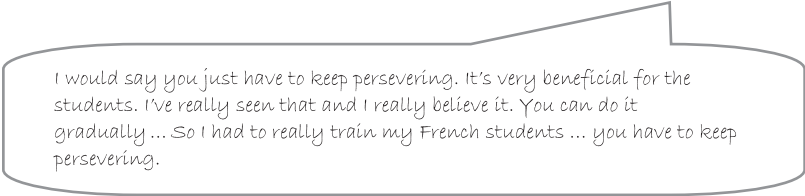
Tania, a teacher of Japanese, working with Year 9 beginner learners in their first year of learning Japanese, speaks about how exposing her students to formulaic language had powerful consequences for their language learning:



*flooding my students with language, and the actual specific formulaic expressions, ... so when they get into later conversations those things just pop out naturally because they're right there, ready to use.*

For some teachers, the idea of using only the target language with beginner language learners may still seem daunting. Jessica, teaching

French to beginner learners, was asked what advice she might have for a teacher who was afraid or reluctant to do so. She replied:



*I would say you just have to keep persevering. It's very beneficial for the students. I've really seen that and I really believe it. You can do it gradually ... So I had to really train my French students ... you have to keep persevering.*

## Other Sources of Input in the Classroom

It is perhaps reassuring to realise that teachers cannot be the sole source of input! Learners need greater amounts of input than can be provided by their teacher, and they also need to be exposed to different varieties of language (see below). One effective way of giving learners exposure to large amounts of written input in the target language is to help them access books. Elley and Mangubhai (1981) set up an extensive reading programme for their learners of English in Fiji. They called it a 'book flood' and gave them copious amounts of books to read for pleasure. They found that these students improved both their reading and their listening comprehension.

Additional opportunities for learners to access language input through aural or visual media include: listening to radio, music, or other audio media, watching films or TV, and accessing social media and other online material. There may also be opportunities in the community for learners to be exposed to the target language.

Some of the opportunities we have referred to may expose learners to authentic language material. By this we mean written or spoken language that is not intended for learners, but rather for those who already speak the language and, in particular, those for whom it is a first language. Examples might be: listening to a commentary on a football match in Spain or watching the tour de France on French television. This may also expose students to different varieties of the language, and also allow them to hear different accents, as well as giving them opportunities to listen to other people using the language who, like them, have learnt it as a second language. Giving learners access to this type of material is important because it is 'real'; it is the sort of language they are likely to come across in contexts where the language is used and,



also, because doing so is usually very motivating and interesting for learners.

## Supporting the Learner to Understand

We have tended to focus thus far in this chapter on the challenge for the teacher in providing the learner with large amounts of language input. However, it is important to consider that the learner also will be challenged as they try to make sense of unfamiliar input in the language they are learning. This is not a bad thing because research tells us that one of the aspects of learning that promotes engagement on the part of the learner is ‘environmental challenge’, a concept which was introduced in Chapter 1 (Shernoff et al., 2017, p. 204). Some of the aspects of environmental challenge that are associated with student engagement are lesson demands (Goetz et al., 2013) and high expectations for student accomplishment (Rubie-Davies et al., 2015), features that appear to have been typical of the classrooms of the teachers we have referred to in this chapter. However, Shernoff et al. (2017) maintain that environmental challenge must be combined with environmental support. In other words, high expectations have to be accompanied by initiatives to scaffold the learner to success. We will now consider ways in which learners may be helped to understand target language input that they are exposed to in the classroom. In other words: how can teachers help to make input comprehensible for students?

Earlier in this chapter, Tania, a teacher of Japanese to beginner learners, talked about ‘flooding’ learners with the target language. However, we will all have had the experience of hearing or reading totally incomprehensible input in a foreign language and it would seem obvious that unless we are given some help or clues in making a connection between what we hear or read and what it means, we will not learn. This, then, is the challenge for the teacher: how to ‘manage’ the input so that it is accessible for the level of the learner. It does not, of course, mean that the learner must understand all language input, but that they need to be able to make some links between what they hear (or read) and what it means.

In the following example, Jessica, a very experienced teacher of French, introduces a new classroom activity to her students who are in their first year of learning the language. As you read this extract, notice the strategies that Jessica uses to help guarantee that her input is comprehensible for her learners.

Example 3.3

		Translation	Comment
T	Nous avons un jeu. Qu'est-ce que c'est un jeu?	We're going to play a game. What's un jeu?	
Unidentified Student	A game		
T	A game. Un jeu, une activité, quelque chose à faire. Vous allez travailler en groupes de trois, oui, groupes de trois, et vous allez jouer à « Guess Who ?, C'est qui ? » Vous allez lire le livre et je vais vous donner quelques questions, par exemple, « elle a treize ans, elle fait de la danse quatre fois par semaine. »	A game. Un jeu, an activity, something to do. You're going to work in groups of three, yes, groups of three and you are going to play 'Guess Who, Who is it?' You are going to read the book and I am going to give you some questions, for example, 'she is 13 and she dances four times a week'.	Students have produced a class book of descriptions they have written of themselves, without including their names. They are now going to use this book for this game. The teacher gives an example statement using a description from this book

Reformulation uses similar words/expressions (une activité, quelque chose à faire) to further help learners establish the meaning of new language

Comprehension check establishes whether students have understood what might be new language – 'un jeu'

Repetition Repeats words and/or phrases e.g. a game, un jeu (note use of English) groupes de trois, groupes de trois

Nous avons un jeu. Qu'est-ce que c'est un jeu?	We're going to play a game. What's un jeu?
A game	
A game. Un jeu, une activité, quelque chose à faire. Vous allez travailler en groupes de trois, oui, groupes de trois, et vous allez jouer à « Guess Who, C'est qui ? » Vous allez lire le livre et je vais vous donner quelques questions, par exemple, « elle a treize ans, elle fait de la danse quatre fois par semaine »	A game. Un jeu, an activity, something to do. You're going to work in groups of three, yes, groups of three and you are going to play 'Guess Who, Who is it?' You are going to read the book and I am going to give you some questions, for example, 'she is 13 and she dances four times a week'.
Gives an example of how to carry out an activity, 'par exemple, "elle a treize ans, elle fait de la danse quatre fois par semaine"'	

One of the key principles guiding the strategies that Jessica uses here is that of *redundancy*. Jessica gives more information than is necessary for

comprehension, but this extra, redundant, information (repetitions, reformulations, examples, translations) helps make this target input more comprehensible. Here we see Jessica providing support for her learners face-to-face. She could also have used gesture or whole-body cues/movement. In online learning contexts (see Chapter 7), learners can make use of a wide range of multimodal resources delivered digitally to support comprehension, often accompanied by emoji or images (tweets, texts, chats, email).

It is most probable, although we can't be sure unless we ask her, that Jessica also used another common way of making her input comprehensible: she used grammar and vocabulary that was adapted to the proficiency level of her learners. In terms of vocabulary, this would most likely be vocabulary that occurred with high frequency in the language. In terms of grammar, Jessica probably used utterances that were shorter and structures that were less complex. Research shows that teachers tend to adjust their language so that it is appropriate to the level of their students naturally, although there is some evidence to suggest that not everyone is equally good at doing this (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

Other ways in which teachers may make what they say comprehensible are:

- Adjusting speed: slowing speech down and making greater use of pauses
- Adjusting volume: speaking more loudly and as clearly and distinctly as possible.

(Ellis & Shintani, 2014)

## Engaging Students with Input

So far in this chapter we have been primarily focused on the 'how' of input, now we need to look at the very important aspect of 'what' input. We will start with the notion of topic.

In research on student engagement, three features have been found to be important: interest, concentration, and enjoyment (Shernoff, 2013; Shernoff et al., 2017). It would seem obvious that teachers need to choose topics that they know will motivate their students to attend to the language they hear or read (see Chapter 2). Margaret, the teacher of Year 11 students of French, had her students listen as she talked about herself and her life as a 6-year-old, even bringing in some of her worn toys from that period of her life. One student said about this lesson:



*I liked learning about Madame X's childhood.*

In talking about her approach to teaching, Margaret recalled her own experience as a language learner. She talked about how motivating it was for her to read stories in French.

*I've always felt that stories were a very good way to learn a language. When I was at school, [every chapter in our] French book, even though it was really old-fashioned started with a story, and as we got older, it was a story from French literature, and I would read on to find out what happened. I do feel that maybe there should be a bit more of an acknowledgement that stories can be a very powerful way of getting students hooked into the language.*

Many students respond to well to games. When these and other activities are designed so that all instructions and materials can only be accessed in the target language, a natural need is created for students to engage with and work to understand what they hear. This type of learning opportunity is likely to lead to learning (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001) and to foster concentration and enjoyment, as we discussed in Chapter 2.

Earlier on in this chapter we focused on the importance of teacher talk in the classroom being in the target language as much as possible. In the research on teacher talk, one focus is on the types of questions that teachers ask in class. Often teachers ask 'display' questions, that is, they require students to give an answer that the teacher already anticipates. An example is the question that Jessica asks when describing the activity that her students are going to do: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est un jeu?' (what is a 'jeu'?) She knows what the word means, but is asking the question to draw their attention to the word 'jeu' and to establish whether they know it. Researchers (e.g. Lee, 2006) claim that teachers need to ask genuine (also known as referential) questions, as well as 'display' questions, because these are how questions are more typically used in everyday conversation. They need to give students the opportunity to be language users, not just language learners. In other words, they need to give learners opportunities to use language the way that it is used in the real world. We can see this in Example 3.4, an extract from Shona's classroom, where she talks to her student, at the beginning of the lesson, about the apple that she is eating. When teachers use the target language to relate to their students in this way, they form and strengthen relationships with them. We saw in Chapter 1 that positive relationships are an important aspect of providing learners with the type of support that they need to learn (Shernoff et al., 2017). There is also evidence that genuine or referential questions are more likely to lead to the type of language output that helps students learn (see Chapter 4).

#### Example 3.4

		Translation
T	Ringo wa oishii desu ka	Is the apple nice?
S	Suppai	It's sour
T	Suppai. Suppakute oishii?	Sour. Sour and nice?

S	Hmmm	
T	Hmmm. Watashi mo, suppai ringo ga suki desu. Ichiban suki na ringo no shurui wa Cox's Orange.	I like sour apples too. My favourite type of apple is Cox's Orange.
S	Haven't heard of it	
T	They're . . . they're small and they're hontou ni suppai. Hontou ni mukashi no shurui	They're . . . they're small and they're really sour. They are a very old variety.

The fact of being able to 'function' successfully in a classroom where the target language is spoken can be very motivating and energising for students. This is something that Jessica refers to. She concludes a discussion about the challenges of using teacher talk or target language in the classroom with a strong endorsement of its effectiveness:

*They just learn so much and also the kids that came into my class that weren't using the target language in class all said 'oh we love this, this is awesome' and they found it very empowering and they picked it up very fast.*

## Input + 1

We have stressed the importance of comprehensible input. In this section we argue that input also needs to present a challenge for the language learner. The formula 'i + 1' represents this notion (Krashen, 1985). Students need access to input that is just beyond their easy comprehension (in other words, 'plus 1'). That is, input that is within their reach for understanding, but which requires them to 'work' or to struggle a little in order to comprehend what they hear or read. In this way, they will make new connections between language input and what this input means and/or how it is structured to convey this meaning. If students are exposed only to language they are familiar with and can understand easily, then they will not be challenged to progress further in their language learning. However, Paul Nation (2006) suggests that, in order for learners to be likely to 'pick up', independently, without teacher assistance, new language as they read or listen to challenging input, only a small amount of language should be unfamiliar. In every hundred words there should be one or two unfamiliar words, and no more than five. In other words, ninety-five to ninety-eight per cent of words should already be familiar.

In the classroom, the experienced teacher can provide help to facilitate comprehension in order to, as mentioned earlier, support learners to cope

with challenge. In the extract below, Nicole provides her learners with input + 1, but also is careful to ‘scaffold’ this activity to facilitate their learning.

Just prior to the extract shown in Example 3.5, Nicole has had her students of Spanish watch a video that shows people purchasing items in a market in Mexico. Watching this video is part of a larger activity that the students are preparing for, which is to compare the differences between supermarkets and markets. The language that they will listen to as they watch the video is challenging for Nicole’s students, who are in their second year of studying Spanish (Year 10). Notice the ‘work’ that Nicole has her students undertake as they are exposed to this challenging input and how she helps them by breaking the challenge into manageable components for them.

### Example 3.5

Bueno, ahora chicas, vamos a escuchar, necesitan sus cuadernos, una pluma o lápiz y vamos a escuchar a un video – so first we’re just going to listen to it – I’m not going to show it to you, y tienen que escribir las palabras que entienden, so the words you understand. Escriben las palabras que entienden. Vale? Listas? And then we’ll watch the video and see how many you can pick up in the second go.

Good, now girls, we are going to listen, you need your notebooks, a pen or pencil and we are going to listen to a video – so first we’re just going to listen to it – I’m not going to show it to you and you are to write the words that you hear, so the words you understand. Write the words you understand. Ok? Ready? And then we’ll watch the video and see how many you can pick up in the second go.

After listening to the sound only the first time, the students then watch the video, at the same time listening for new words they don’t know to add to their list. This second time they are also thinking about how markets might be similar to or different from supermarkets as they listen. So each time the learners listen to/watch this video they are given a goal which guides their listening/viewing.

Determining whether input is ‘linguistically rich’ for a given group of students will of course require some knowledge of their proficiency. Where students in a class vary greatly in proficiency, using differentiated instruction to cater for all needs is important (Tomlinson, 2014). In fact, in Chapters 1 and 2, we discussed how one of the indicators of a positive classroom environment is having learning activities that match students’ needs. Sometimes, it may be appropriate for all students to work at the same task but for different students to have varying degrees of scaffolding to successfully complete it. For example, in the listening task described above, lower proficiency students, new to the language, could be given some of the words they will hear along with images, so that they only need circle the words they hear rather than have to write them down.

We have stressed the importance of comprehensible input while also acknowledging that it is not enough just to ensure that input is comprehensible: it also needs to be comprehended. In other words, the teacher needs not only to provide the conditions for learning, learning needs to occur! In order for learning to take place, the learner needs to notice and pay attention to the language that

they are being exposed to. In particular, they need to notice what words mean, how they sound, what they collocate with (i.e., what words tend to occur with others), how they change and when – the patterns of language that are new to them. Of course, it is the role of the teacher, too, to help students ‘notice’. In Chapter 5 we will return to this idea again. In this chapter we argue that having students notice and pay attention to aspects of language is necessary; in Chapter 5 we will discuss in some detail how this might happen and give examples.

### The Noticing Hypothesis

In 1995, Schmidt controversially argued that nothing is free in language learning. In other words, in order for a language feature to be learnt, the learner has to notice and pay attention to it.

More recently, Schmidt (2001) has modified his initial stance to acknowledge that some learning might be possible without noticing, but he maintains that the more that is noticed, the more that is learnt.

## Maximising Input Outside the Classroom

Earlier in this chapter we referred to the fact that the second language learner is often disadvantaged in comparison to the first language learner because they have so much less exposure to the target language. Certainly, this is the case if the only access that the learner has to the language is while they are in the classroom. Increasingly, however, especially with advances in technology (see Chapter 7), the learner has ways of accessing target language input outside of the classroom. We asked a number of teachers for suggestions of ways in which they thought that learners could access target language output outside of the classroom.

Jessica comments:

*I give quite a lot of them some reading to do. I encourage them to watch French movies and I encourage them to watch video clips ... [I encourage them to] go to La Cloche [French café] at the weekend and listen to the French people and I think they do do that but I could probably encourage much more input outside of class. I get them to send texts to each other in French.*

James, also a teacher of beginner learners of French, explains how he attempts to give his students opportunities outside of the classroom:

*YouTube, music, you know, there's heaps of stuff. I run a trip to New Caledonia in Year 11 and I dangle that in front of the kids in Year 9. Get the seniors in, 'hey guys, let's talk about our trip'. What else do I do? French film festivals.*

Shona comments that her Year 11 students in their third year of learning Japanese watch anime in Japanese with English subtitles. Another teacher of Japanese, the only teacher of Japanese in her school, and teaching students from Years 8 to 13 (i.e. aged 12 to 18 years), describes an anime club set up by her students of Japanese that runs regularly on a Friday during lunchtime. For her the benefit of this exposure to the language is that students will pick up incidentally on different expressions in Japanese:

*because when we do certain writing, often [an] expression will come [up].*

This teacher also describes a school intranet where she can give students access to different types of language input in Japanese.

*Each class level has got their dashboard and I put in lots of websites of interest that connect to radio stations, TV, language clips of interest.*

Exposing learners to a wide range of different types of input is also important because it allows learners to see how varied language is and how much it changes according to who is involved, what is being talked about, and in what context the language is being used. Referring to the idea we discussed previously, that is, that comprehension precedes output, students need to be aware of and understand these variations in language use before they themselves can use language in these different ways.

## The Teacher as Language Learner

Some teachers may feel that they cannot use the target language in the classroom because, while they may have expertise in teaching languages, they may not themselves be highly proficient speakers of the language



they are teaching. In the following interview extract, a teacher contrasts her proficiency in Mandarin with that in French.

And in Mandarin, where I'm much less proficient in learning the language ... [in class] we don't have as rich a [repertoire] of expressions as we do in French, but my Mandarin students from Day One they had to say 'thank you, you're welcome, hello, sorry, I'm hungry, I'm thirsty, Can I go to the [toilet], laoshi'... they use all of those. Whereas the [students] who had the Mandarin teacher, who is Chinese, they don't use [Mandarin] and it's because they didn't get trained to say all these things.

It is interesting that this teacher makes the point that proficiency in the target language does not, by itself, ensure the best learning conditions for students. The teacher needs skill and determination to know how to structure and use input for students to be able to learn from it. Another advantage for teachers (like this one) who are not so proficient in the language they are teaching is that they can better identify with the experience of language learning, and even model the example of 'an effective language learner'. What is crucial is that they see themselves as ongoing learners of the language they are teaching.

### 'Translanguaging' in the Language Classroom

There has been a lot of focus on the use of the target language in the classroom in this chapter. However, it would be wrong to conclude that a teacher must never use the students' first or other languages. Jessica refers to how helpful using the first language can be (in her classroom the L1 of almost all students is English), especially at the beginning stages of language learning.

I would say you just have to keep persevering. It's very beneficial for the students. I've really seen that and I really believe it. You can do it gradually ... you can use a bit of English. So I had to really train my French students and I'd say that English has been reduced over the year and that I personally don't think that it's a crime especially with beginners to use English. I think you have to have a bit to help them ... they're 13 so it's not like they're little pre-schoolers that don't know the difference, they really really need to have the English to hold their hand but you have to keep persevering.

However, rather than talking about teachers using the students' 'L1', it is better to use the term 'translanguaging', given that, in many classrooms, there are learners from different language backgrounds, many of them speaking more than one language. Translanguaging refers to the process

where two or more languages are used to make meaning or gain knowledge and understanding (Martínez-Alvarez, 2017). Teachers can ‘translanguage’ or use any of the languages that learners are familiar with, including the target language, in a number of ways to help language and literacy learning (Hornberger & Link, 2012). For example, the teacher may give an explanation about language or make a comparison between the target language and another language (see Chapter 5). There is evidence to suggest that learners can perform at a higher level when they use a language they are proficient in (Alegria de la Colina & Del Pilar Garcia Mayo, 2009), and also that they may be less anxious (Auerbach, 1993). Denying learners the right to translanguage may be seen as a rejection of the language(s) they know (Cook, 2001) and a denial of their right to be treated as individuals and with respect (Edstrom, 2006).

## The Expanded Learning Space

An underlying message of this chapter, perhaps, is that creating a rich language learning environment is a significant challenge for the teacher of foreign languages. For teachers who are working in immersion, content-based learning, study abroad, and other learning contexts, it will not be so difficult to ensure that their students have access to input and a rich learning environment. However, many teachers work in a ‘drip feed’ context where the time for language learning is a limited number of hours per week. For them it can be important to remember that people have, for centuries, been successfully learning foreign languages, working with constraints similar to those that may be facing them. For them, too, the advice of one researcher who has had a long career working in the context of second language teaching in Canada, may be helpful. Patsy Lightbown (2014) suggests that teachers who are faced with the ‘drip feed’ context may need to embrace an aim that is more realistic for their students in terms of language learning outcomes. Rather than a focus on fluency or high degrees of proficiency, they may want to ensure that their learners have:

- a positive attitude to language learning; and
- the ability to use what little language they do know to understand and make themselves understood.

Lightbown argues that when working in contexts where there is reduced time, it is important for teachers to help learners to continue to learn outside of the classroom. Collins and Muñoz (2016) take this idea even

further and refer to the notion of an ‘expanded learning space’. In other words, the learner can be helped to see that the classroom is only one place where learning can take place and that they need to take responsibility for ongoing learning outside of this space. Of course, technology can play an important role here for the learner, and we will investigate this further in Chapter 7. Teachers could also encourage their learners to see themselves as lifelong learners of a language or, indeed, of any languages. In other words, language learning is not limited in terms of space, nor in terms of time.

## Summary of This Chapter

In this chapter we have examined why creating opportunities for learners to be exposed to target language input is so important in the learning process.

## Key Points

- Learners need large amounts of language input in order to develop proficiency in the language they are learning.
- One way of maximising learner exposure to the target language is for the teacher to use it as much as possible in the classroom.
- Teachers need to support learners as they expose them to large amounts of input; good teachers are highly skilled in ‘scaffolding’ learners to understand language input.
- Input needs to challenge learners, so that they have to work a bit to comprehend what they read or hear.
- Learners need to notice and pay attention to language, in particular language that is new to them.
- There is a place for ‘translanguaging’ – using other languages that learners are familiar with – to help language learning in the classroom.
- Learners need to take responsibility for their own learning and realise that the classroom is only one of the contexts in which they can learn a language.

## Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Think of your own language learning experience (or that of another learner you know). To what extent did the development of comprehension skills precede the ability to use the language productively?
- 2 What type of input did you find helpful as a learner? What examples can you give of input + 1? How were you supported to make sense of this input?

- 3 In classrooms you are familiar with, what are/were some of the routines? What formulaic expressions/language could be associated with these?
- 4 To what extent is the target language used in your class or in a class you have observed? What constraints are there and how might these be addressed?
- 5 In a context which is familiar to you, do students face challenges in getting exposure to extensive amounts of language input? What is/could be done to help maximise exposure to the target language? Discuss/reflect on how this might benefit your students. Are there any limitations?
- 6 Is the idea of an ‘extended learning space’ (Collins & Muñoz, 2016) helpful for a context you are familiar with?

## Further Reading

Saito, K., & Hanzawa, K. (2016). Developing second language oral ability in foreign language classrooms: The role of the length and focus of instruction and individual differences. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 37, 813–840. Doi:10.1017/S0142716415000259

In this paper, the authors looked at the oral language ability of Japanese learners of English who had learnt English at school from the ages of 12 to 17. They compared them with Japanese learners of English who had moved to Canada after the age of 18 and had been there for more than 20 years. The aim of the study was to find out what oral language gains the adolescent learners had made and how important the length of instruction was (some of the adolescent learners attended ‘cram’ schools outside of their regular school classrooms). The authors also considered the impact of the type of instruction and language aptitude variables (see Chapter 2).

## For Reflection and Discussion

- (a) On pages 815, and 824–827, Saito & Hanzawa give information about the types of conditions that tend to characterise foreign language learning, and the learning contexts that were characteristic of the learners in this study. To what extent are these typical of contexts you are familiar with?
- (b) What factors predicted successful learning for the learners in this study? (The Discussion section will be particularly helpful here.) What conclusions could be made about the importance of language input?