Applying the Input (Reading) Hypothesis:
Some history and a look ahead
インプット（リーディング）仮説の応用
―これまでと今後を視野に入れながら―

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Abstract: The Reading Hypothesis calls for students to do large amounts of interesting and comprehensible reading. When introduced in Japan, this presented a challenge to the established approach and resulted in a compromise, the eclectic approach, combining reading for meaning and Intensive Reading. Studies, however, consistently show that doing large amounts of self-selected reading, with no "skill-building" and no language study, results in impressive gains. We present a way of applying a pure version of the Reading Hypothesis that includes a neglected stage: large amounts of highly comprehensible and interesting reading. The goal of the program is to help students reach the level where they can do self-selected reading of authentic texts.

PART ONE: SOME HISTORY

The history of the application of the Input Hypothesis in Japan is of interest to all of us, as it describes what happens when progress in theory and research conflicts with traditional practice. When the Input Hypothesis in the form of the Reading Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) was introduced into Japan in the mid-1980's it led to the re-introduction of what is called Extensive Reading. Many schools purchased graded readers from different publishers, and teachers began to include reading with their students of English as a foreign language. According to several observations, most English teachers in Japan were quite reluctant to use reading as a significant part of the program, but used it as a supplement to Intensive Reading, part of the traditional grammar translation method. The pull of traditional skill-building methodology was strong.

The idea of including increased quantities of reading was not new in English education in Japan. In 1937 (about 80 years ago), when students read 200 pages in their first year, 300 pages in their second year, and 350 pages in their third year (see Matsumura, 1984, p. 174), they called it TADOKU ("a lot of reading"). The amount of read was quite small, but it was considerably more than what had been happening in "intensive reading" programs.

This TADOKU practice disappeared from classrooms and nothing like this was done in Japan until the

Input (Reading) Hypothesis was introduced in the mid-1980's. The term TADAKU was, however, known to professionals, and textbooks and guidebooks for teacher education described what it was, but none of the students whom I (B. Mason) worked with seemed to know what TADOKU was when they came to my program. Japanese students were educated heavily in intensive translation reading practice, and the tests were largely multiple choice.

TADOKU was very popular 80 years ago. It disappeared from classrooms was, most likely because 1) there was no theory supporting it; its use was based on intuition and personal theories of the teachers; 2) there was no empirical evidence to support the effects and efficiency of TADOKU, as this kind of research was not done in the field of language education in those days; and lastly; 3) there were not enough graded readers (they called them "plateau readers" in those days) to make massive amounts of comprehensible input possible.

But now we have the Reading Hypothesis, an abundant number of graded readers in English from different publishers, and research evidence to support TADOKU.

The Input Hypothesis clearly implied that massive amounts of reading was necessary, because comprehensible input is the cause of language acquisition, and reading is a major source of comprehensible input. But both native speaker teachers and Japanese teachers did Extensive Reading the same way previous teachers did TADOKU. This conflicted with the implications of the Input Hypothesis. In addition, there were other conflicts with the implications of the Input Hypothesis.

Self-Selection and Narrow Reading

For students to pay attention to their reading, it has to be very interesting. The best way to ensure this is for students to select their own reading material. But students in Extensive Reading programs in Japan were not usually free to choose what they wanted to read, guaranteeing that most reading is not interesting. Popular approaches included having the entire class read the same assigned book and testing students on every book they read. At the opposite extreme, students were allowed to select their own reading material but were provided with no guidance or suggestions: they were simply "turned loose" in the library."

Related to this is the desirability of narrow reading, feeling free to read in areas of personal interest without trying to read "widely" (Krashen, 2000). It has been hypothesized that reading a great deal in any genre will result in substantial acquisition of literacy (vocabulary, grammar, etc) that will make reading in other areas and genres more comprehensible. Extensive reading in Japan makes no attempt to encourage narrow reading.

Gradual Acquisition versus Direct Instruction

Research tells us that massive reading is the best path to developing grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge (Krashen, 2004). As students read and encounter new grammar and vocabulary in comprehensible contexts, they gradually acquire it. This natural way of acquiring language has been shown to be more efficient than direct instruction (Mason and Krashen, 2004; Mason, Vanata, Jander, Borsch, and Krashen, 2009; Mason, 2018), resulting in greater and more stable knowledge of language with far less effort. In fact, acquisition of language this way is pleasant, as long as the reading is interesting. Nevertheless, in EFL classes in Japan direct instruction has remained the preferred method, despite the lack of evidence.

Input, not Output

The Input Hypothesis claims that we acquire language from input, not from output: Talking and writing are not practicing. The ability to produce language is the result of language acquisition, not the cause. This claim is supported by studies showing that increasing the amount of output produced, oral or written, does not clearly relate to improvement in language and literacy (Krashen, 1994). Nevertheless, traditional foreign language instruction emphasizes output.[1]

The Emergence of Eclectic Teaching

The Input Hypothesis and the focus on massive reading clearly conflicted with the previous paradigm. One attempt to resolve the tension between the implications of the Input Hypothesis and traditional teaching was the emergence of "eclectic" teaching, defined by the British Council as follows: "… a teacher's use of techniques and activities from a range of language teaching approaches and methodologies."
(British Council: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/eclectic-approach)

The eclectic approach appears to be motivated at least in part by the assumption that the truth is always in the middle, that we need "moderation" in all things, and that eclecticism is always a virtue.

The Movement Toward More Input

Method comparison research until recently was actually a comparison between methods providing more comprehensible input and methods providing less comprehensible input (CI) with the evidence clearly supporting the view that more CI has been shown to be more effective than less CI (e.g. Isik, 2000), a severe blow to any eclectic approach demanding equal representation from both sides. But we must ask what would happen if we switched to an all-input approach, if we moved from 50% or 75% input to 100%?

There is good evidence that pure input in the form of reading works very well. Research shows that

intermediate students can do well on tests such as the TOEFL and TOEIC as the result of developing proficiency in English from listening to stories and reading books, and in a reasonable amount of time, with only modest or no formal "study" of language (Mason, 2013a, 2017, 2019).

PART TWO: LOOKING AHEAD

Below, we describe a path students can take in becoming readers in English that is consistent with the Input Hypothesis.

From Guided to Independent, from Modified to Authentic

In traditional classes for older students, students begin by reading short passages that are packed with unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, and, as a result, are of limited interest and comprehensibility. In the second year, they are required to read classic texts. We describe below a more interesting and more effective path.

We suggest that the path to competence in reading, and thus the path to advanced second language proficiency, begins with "guided" reading of "modified" texts. "Guided" means that the teacher selects or suggests reading material. "Modified" reading material is written especially for less advanced readers in a second or foreign language. This includes texts known as graded readers, very abundant in English, but unfortunately not easy to find in other languages.

The goal of the program is that eventually students will be able to select what they read themselves, and will be able to read authentic texts, those written by and for native speakers.

For very beginning readers, those at the zero level and just above, all reading is selected by the teacher. This includes texts corresponding to stories that the teacher has told in Story Listening sessions (detailed information about Story Listening is available at https://storiesfirst.org/).

As students develop their competence, they select more and more of their own reading, but largely from the collection assembled by the teacher ("Guided Self-Selected Reading"). This includes graded readers. (Graded Readers are classified into different difficulty levels by publishers, but students are free to select any books from the collection that they are interested in and find comprehensible.) The Guided Self-Selected Reading stage may include some "authentic" reading material (Mason, 2019).

In Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR) teachers do not ask the student to: 1) answer comprehension questions; 2) write summaries in the target language; 3) talk about the story in the target language; 4) require the whole class to read and discuss the same book as the primary means of developing second

language literacy; and 5) limit reading to 10 to 15 minutes in class. Students can consult dictionaries, but are not required to make a list of and study the new words that they encountered in the books that they read.

During the GSSR stage, students are asked to 1) read books that they can understand and enjoy; 2) for adult learners, eventually read at least 100 pages per week (e.g. Mason, 2013b; Mason & Krashen, 2019); and 3) keep a record of the books that they read.

We now have a good idea of what books students would like to read and the number of hours and pages of reading it takes to accomplish this goal (Nation, 2014; McQuillan, 2016; Mason and Krashen, 2017).

No accountability

One often asked question from teachers regarding this type of self-selected free reading is that they cannot be sure that students are actually reading. They therefore ask students to write book reports or they ask comprehension questions for each book read. When I (B. Mason) had my entire junior college class just read for 90-minutes, I noticed that they read books one after another, finding a new book soon after finished reading one. The room was entirely quiet.

They were not pretending to read; Evidence this was so is that fact that their reading test scores increased up steadily and the gains each year were very similar. Von Sprecken and Krashen (1998) also reported that 90% of the students they observed were engaged in classroom reading during reading time.

The key to guiding them to reading is to show them books that they can read and help them experience success. This will result in competence, self-confidence and interest in reading. It does not require that we ask them comprehension questions or test them on what they read in any way.

Forcing them to be responsible for perfect understanding of each book they read is a cruel request to those who are still in training. No one is expected to be a perfect driver when they first begin to take driving lessons.

Conclusion

School does not produce perfect masters. The goal of school is to bring students to the point where they can continue to improve on their own. In second language education, this means enough competence to understand at least some of what they hear from competent speakers in the second language and some of what they read, as well as some understanding of how language is acquired.

This means that when students complete the guided stage, including Guided Self Selected Reading, and are comfortable reading self-selected material on their own, our job is done.

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Notes

1. Note, however, that writing can make other kinds of contributions: writing helps us solve problems (Krashen, 2005) and can influence cognitive development.

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