



# POTENTIAL IMPACT OF COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT ON MOROCCAN STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE FLUENCY

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## KeyWords

Speaking skills, Comprehensible input, Ecosystem, Ubiquitous M-tech, Opaque input.

## Abstract

Language learning is no longer a matter of sitting in a class with a pen in hand aiming at making notes about new vocabulary, new rules and new ways of how to become a native-like speaker. In this day and age, the abiding classical role of the teacher -being the unique source of language input- has collapsed under a heavy pressure of a giant native like environment that has been erected by a ubiquitous M-tech surrounding students. Nowadays, language students or students of other subjects are capable of reaching what was beyond the reach of their predecessors. The ubiquitous nature of M-tech, that surrounds the language learner with all the different types of input, has created a symbiotic environment where the learner interacts with the language in its natural context. In this regard, the present Applied Linguistic investigation analyzed the role of comprehensive input, which students' ecosystem provides, in enhancing students' speaking skills regardless of the amount of input they are exposed to in the classroom. This study assessed 40 undergraduate students who belong to the English studies department at the School of Arts and Humanities, Moulay Ismail University. The investigation adopted a mixed method research design in assessing students' speaking using two separate tasks to reveal the discrepancy between the ecosystem impact and the classroom role in providing comprehensible input. The results disclosed that the natural comprehensible input is at an advantage.

## Introduction

Along history, there has always been a debate about the role of the environment of the learner in enhancing his/her linguistic performance, especially in the production process. In this regard, scholars like Vygotsky, Krashen, Piaget, etc. investigated the issue and developed a number of hypotheses, which are still relied upon when related issues are evoked. Vygotsky with his sociocultural theory of cognitive development, Piaget with his theory of stages of cognitive development, and Krashen with the input-hypothesis.

The present paper came to utilize Krashen's hypothesis with an in-depth analysis of the input that students are exposed to at the present time. It compared the role of the environment of the learner in providing two types of input: The instructional input or opaque input that is provided by the teacher and peers of students in language classrooms; and the environmental input that is yielded by the learners ecological system ("What is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory?", 2019). This study questioned the claimed supremacy of the language classroom in empowering students speaking skills. Furthermore, it hypothesized the hegemony of the environmental input in this regard.

## 1. Review of the Literature

### 1.1. Comprehensible Input

The term comprehensible input has been widely used by researchers who investigated the relationship between the language that a learner is exposed to in his/her immediate environment and his/her performance in speaking. All those studies influenced the way educationalists and specialists in language education approach new hypotheses. In language pedagogy, Krashen applied the results of his observations and hypotheses to make the transition in teaching methodology from previously rule-based methodologies such as in Grammar Translation Method and Audio-lingual Method to methodologies that focus on meaning and comprehensibility (Liu, 2015, p.139).

In his hypothesis, Krashen asserts that a language acquirer is more likely to learn a language when he/she understands the language input that must always be meaningful (Quarterly, 1984, p.352). The hypothesis states that the input must necessarily contain language structures and vocabulary that is beyond the level of the language acquirer who is exposed to that input (Quarterly, 1984, p.352).

According to Krashen, speaking ability is not taught but it rather progresses as the speaker is exposed to more meaningful input. This means that a second language learner who is exposed to meaningful input is similar to a child who acquires his mother tongue. In other words, a child who acquires language in a natural, fluid, and automatic manner through exposure to challenging language items always succeeds to produce the language in a later stage (Quarterly, 1984).

A limited number of studies investigated how a child processes his mother tongue. This exposure and the way parents or others, referred to as the caregiver speech, caretaker speech, or the motherese speech (Quarterly, 1984), modify the child's speech in the following ways as stated in Newport, Gleitman, Clark, Philips, and Cross :

- Does not deliberately attempt to teach language.
- Modifies his or her speech in order to aid comprehension.
- Uses short, simple sentences that become more complex as the child gets older.
- Repeats him- or herself frequently to assure comprehension.
- Corrects language only to clarify meaning.

(p.353)

Krashen's studies showed the fundamental role of comprehensible input in developing the language of acquirer of a mother tongue or a second language. However, there have always been divergent positions towards the input

hypothesis. In 1983, a group of Spanish research group faculty members started working on a comprehension based approach to the teaching of Spanish for non-native speakers (Vanpatten, 1987, p.353).

Most of the criticism to Krashen's input hypothesis assumed that his hypothesis focused on second language environment not a formal EFL classroom. Higgs questioned the transferability of the input hypothesis to formal settings like the language classroom (Vanpatten, 1987, p.353).

The bone of contention between Krashen's hypothesis and all the criticism is based on two main points. The first one is that the comparison between the environment of the first language acquirer and the foreign language learner seemed difficult as the latter is not spoken in the speech community of the learner. The second point was the transferability of the input hypothesis from the informal settings to the formal ones.

The present paper came to confirm or disconfirm the virtual presence of the target language in the environment of the language learner through the ubiquitous M-tech in students' ecosystems. Moreover, it compared the impact of the opaque input in formal settings and the comprehensible input in students' ecosystems.

## 1.2. Ubiquitous M-tech and Language Learning

The advancement and evolution of portable devices and wireless technology resulted in root-and-branch changes in social, cultural and economic life of modern people (El-hussein & Cronje, 2010, para.3).

From a historical perspective, during the 90s and late 2000s, M-tech supported additional media types and interfaces on mobile devices. According to research, it was very beneficial to language learning as the learner could select the appropriate modality that fostered intensive operations and gave chances for him/her to shape their schema (Joseph & Uther, 2009, p.7).

Recently, enormous challenges have been witnessed to how learning, learning design, and learning environments have changed. To understand the informal nature of learning through M-tech and the way they occupy the immediate environment of students, Van't Hooft, Swan, Cook, and Lin (cited in Park, 2011, para. 7) stated that nowadays "all students have access to a variety of digital devices and services including computers connected to the internet and mobile computing devices."

All the existing investigations demonstrated the fundamental role of M-tech in the enhancement of language acquisition of non-native speakers of English (Bahrani & Sim, 2012, p.142).

The review of the literature, addressing the role of M-tech in informal language learning, confirmed that mobility, accessibility, and the ubiquitous nature of M-tech did enhance language learning. It endorsed previous theories that addressed the role of the environment in developing linguistic skills. However, to relate the research objectives to the existing literature, a more in-depth analysis was needed to divulge the relationship between speaking skills and M-tech.

A lot of attention was given to the influence of the internet and M-tech on studying English. The studies, which addressed this issue, ranged from psychological effects to didactic ones. However, a significant number of aspects have not been tackled yet (Molchanova, 2014, p. 134).

In a research conducted by Kemp and Conway, it was observed that users of M-tech were more and more using extraordinary longer talks on the internet without physically meeting each other (2002, p.1). However, they said that using technology to talk to each other was not surprising or new to man king, but it goes back to "the discovery of hieroglyphics, the written word, and the telephone" (2002, p.1). For them, what surprised was the degree with which people use technology.

Previous research revealed some reasons, which are making M-tech more influencing for speaking than what anybody expected before. Such (cited in Kemp & Coway, 2002, p.4) claimed that technological communication is

uncovering a social problem and added that “we have people finding romance on the internet, but people on the trains and buses who don’t feel comfortable talking to each other.” He added that “we have people who won’t talk to their neighbors, but can talk to people on the other side of the world (cited in Kemp & Coway, 2002, p.4).”

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Research Approach**

This study adopted a mixed method approach. A qualitative method aimed at finding the type of content students access more frequently in informal settings using. What is more, a quantitative method targeted contrasting the performance of students in two different speaking tests, which they had to take and be scored in.

### **2.2. Sample Population and Sampling Technique**

The target population included a sample of 40 undergraduate students of the English Department at the School of Arts and Humanities, Moulay Ismail University in Meknes. The study adopted convenience non-random sampling. With this method of sampling, it was possible to involve a number of individuals who represented the whole population.

### **2.3. Data Collection Procedures**

In this study, data was collected using two instruments: an interview and two tests in speaking. The interview aimed at probing the type of content students access on the net. The first test targeted assessing students speaking skills by asking them to describe some of the courses they previously studied as part of the school curriculum, whereas, in the second test, they were given pictures from the content they access on the net. The two tests used rubrics for scoring students performances. Each of which represented a different skill in speaking. Every rubric was scored at the ratio level from 00 to 20. They consisted of 1) Fluency & coherence, 2) Lexical source, 3) Grammatical range and accuracy, and 4) pronunciation.

Data collection utilized a two-stage method. In the first stage, students were interviewed using a grid, the interview directed them to report about the content they access on the net in informal settings using the target language. Students’ choices were statistically quantified to find the types of content they access more often. To disentangle this process, students were asked to describe the contents they access more frequently in the test of speaking.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This section incorporated the analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the survey questionnaire and the tests adopted. Besides, it drew implications of the findings for teachers and language institutions.

### **3.1. Contents Students Access on the Net**

Teachers were asked about their teaching styles. They had to choose between two dichotomous choices either teaching communicatively or preaching. After analysis, the results revealed the following.

Students were interrogated about the internet platform that they access the most to help report about their impact on speaking skills. The statistical table evoked what follows:

**Table 3.1. Students Access Rate to Different Platforms in Informal Settings**

Net Content Accessed		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Instagram	14	35,0	35,0	35,0
	Facebook	10	25,0	25,0	60,0
	YouTube	8	20,0	20,0	80,0
	TikTok	7	17,5	17,5	97,5
	Other	1	2,5	2,5	100,0
	Total	40	100,0	100,0	

The table demonstrated that Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok ranked top of the list of platforms that students informed to access more often. Students choices of the types of content they access were utilized in the test that targeted the performance of students in speaking in informal settings.

### 3. 2. Comparison of students Performance in the Two Tests in Speaking

Students took two tests using the same method of testing- describing pictures representing content- and two different types of content.

#### 3.2.1. Fluency and Cogerecence

The scores of students' achievement in the two tests were compared in terms of fluency and coherence and the results demonstrated the following.

**Table 3.2. Students' fluency and coherence in both opaque input and comprehensible input**

Descriptive Statistics Fluency and Coherence				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Opaque	Fluency & Coherence	11,15	2,107	40
Comprehensible	Fluency & Coherence	14,33	1,831	40

The results demonstrated that the mean for students' performance in reaction to the opaque input was much lower than their performance as a response to comprehensible input. In order to get further details a test of correlation was run.

**Table 3.3. Correlation between students' fluency and coherence in both opaque and comprehensible input**

<b>Correlations Fluency and Coherence</b>			Opaque Fluency & Coherence	Comprehensibl & e Fluency & Coherence
Opaque Coherence	Fluency	& Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1  40	,731**  40
Comprehensible & Coherence	Fluency	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	,731**  40	1  40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the correlation matrix, fluency and coherence in opaque input positively correlated with fluency and coherence in comprehensible input. This is because correlation coefficient was 0.731. Moreover, the p. value was significant at 0.000. This meant that the significance level obtained it highly significant. In simple words, students' scores increased together and decreased together in both tests. However, they were more fluent when exposed to comprehensible input than when exposed to opaque input.

### 3.2.2. Lexical Resource

The achievement of students in the two tests in speaking was compared in terms of lexical resource when exposed to opaque input and comprehensible input.

**Table 3.4. Students' lexical resource in both opaque and comprehensible input**

<b>Descriptive Statistics Lexical Resource</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Opaque Lexical Resources	10,60	1,722	40
Comprehensible Lexical Resources	13,58	1,299	40

When the means were compared, the results showed that the mean in comprehensible input was much higher than the mean in opaque input. It demonstrated that students' performance was highly better when they were exposed to comprehensible input. However, a test of correlation was used to statistically confirm the results obtained.

**Table 3.5. Correlation between students' Lexical Resource in both opaque input and comprehensible input**

<b>Correlations Lexical Resource</b>	
Opaque Lexical Resources	Comprehensible Lexical Resources

Opaque Lexical Resources	Pearson Correlation	1	,667**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	40	40
Comprehensible Resources	Lexical Pearson Correlation	,667**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	40	40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix demonstrated that the significance level is highly significant at 0.000 with a correlation coefficient of 0.667. Students scores went in the same direction, but lexical resource was richer when they were asked to describe a picture from content that was taken from what represented comprehensible input.

### 3.2.3. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

After fluency and coherence, and lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy were tested to compare performance in grammar and accuracy in both comprehensible input and opaque input. The results showed the following.

*Table 3.6. Students' grammatical range and accuracy in both opaque and comprehensible input*

Descriptive Statistics Grammatical Range and Accuracy				
		Std.		
		Mean	Deviation	N
Opaque Grammatical Range & Accuracy		10,83	1,152	40
Comprehensible Grammatical Range & Accuracy		10,88	1,343	40

From the above table, the means of students' achievement in grammar and accuracy were almost the same in the two tests. This could be explained by the fact that the type of input does not influence accuracy of language since it is a skill that is developed in both classrooms and in informal settings regardless of the type of input students are exposed to. It is also a skill that is enhanced alongside grammar exercises as well as oral exposition to the target language. To be more accurate, a statistical test of correlation was resorted to.

*Table 3.7. Correlation between students' Grammatical Range and Accuracy in both opaque input and comprehensible input*

Correlations Grammatical Range and Accuracy		
	Opaque Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Comprehensible Grammatical Range & Accuracy

Opaque Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Pearson Correlation	1	,764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	40	40
Comprehensible Grammatical Range & Accuracy	Pearson Correlation	,764**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	40	40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix showed that the p.value was significant at 0.000 and the correlation coefficient was 0.764. In this skill, the positive relationship was stronger than the two previous skills. Students' scores decreased and increased together. However, the difference between students performance in both skills was not so obvious if we compare the means.

### 3.2.4. Pronunciation

Table 3.8. Students' pronunciation in both opaque and comprehensible input

Descriptive Statistics Pronunciation			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Opaque Pronunciation	10,10	1,392	40
Comprehensible Pronunciation	12,05	1,467	40

In the last comparison of means, the results revealed the same discrepancy. The mean of students' pronunciation in the opaque input was lower than the one in the comprehensible input. That is to say, when students started describing content from what they usually choose to access, their pronunciation was more native-like. Watching videos and listening to audios and scripts on the internet enhanced their pronunciation, whereas, in a classroom, their pronunciation was bound to what they hear from their peers and teacher who might not sometimes have a good pronunciation.

Table 3.7. Correlation between students' Pronunciation in both opaque input and comprehensible input

Correlations Pronunciation			
		Opaque Pronunciation	Cpmprehensible Pronunciation
Opaque Pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	1	,776**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	40	40
Comprehensible Pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	,776**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	40	40

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



With a correlation coefficient of 0.776 and a p. value of 0.000, the correlation matrix showed that students' scores in both tests correlated positively showing a concordance in their performance. However, in terms of achievement, their pronunciation was much better in comprehensible input.

### 3.3. Findings

- Comprehensible input enhances students speaking skills at all levels.
- Ubiquitous M-tech has become part of students' ecosystems originating a native like environment full of comprehensible input.
- Students fluency and pronunciation is the outcome of comprehensible input surrounding them.
- By being exposed to comprehensible input, students develop natural learning strategies.
- Students understand and use the language as long as it is part of comprehensible input.
- Having a rich lexicon is much more related to comprehensible input.
- Accuracy and grammar mastery cannot always be attributed to comprehensible input, the opaque input can also play its role at this level.

### 3.4. Implications for Teachers and Language Institutions

Schools should think about creating a native like environment like drama clubs to foster learning.

The ubiquitous nature of M-tech should be exploited by both institutions and teachers to transfer students' linguistic skills from informal to formal settings.

Teachers should coach construction of meaning by giving directions of how students can enhance comprehensible input in their immediate environment.

Institutions and teachers should think about using different sources of input – listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Teachers have to adopt a strategy of teaching that bears on comprehensible input hypothesis.

Institutions should go beyond using technology in the form of emailing lessons or using projectors in class to utilizing technology to create a native like environment where comprehensible input is guaranteed.

Institutions and teachers should tolerate students' own choices of topics that appeal to their interests.

Teachers should think about prioritizing listening comprehension and speaking activities.

They should adopt their speech to the level of their students by keeping it challenging but not hindering comprehension and learning.

### 3.5. Conclusion

The present study tackled a fundamental factor in language learning, which is comprehensible input. It based its assumptions on Krashen's hypothesis of comprehensible input. It compared the influence of comprehensible input, which the ubiquitous technology provides and the opaque input always presented to students in language classes. The results revealed the superiority of comprehensible input, which was found to be at an advantage.

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