Forget what you think you know - the real story about what works in languages classrooms

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A Damascan way pedagogical reckoning

- *del questo libro (= of the this book) | *di questo libro*
- *in vicino di | *vicino a* (= near)
- *"Why can't they get those forms correct? I've taught them a million times!"* = articles, verb forms

Me, myself, I

Teaching Italian for 30 years

Languages enthusiast - linguist - focus on form

That's how I thought I'd learned Italian

But wait... first and enduring contact in early childhood; a sort of linguistic imprinting: input, input, input

OMG

- Am I actually teaching anyone anything?
- Is there any real change in students' language ability?
- How can I understand what's happening?

Me, myself, I again

Some important questions to ask ourselves:

1. What is language learning?
2. Does what I'm doing contribute to this?
3. How do I know?
4. Where can I get some good outside perspectives on this?

Some lessons I've learned:

1. *Rules ain't rules* - languages are complex and difficult to explain; we use languages without being able to explain them; the idea of interlanguage (Selinker, 1972)
2. Even simple rules aren't simple - trousers/trouser; spaghetti/spaghetto
3. Telling isn't teaching
4. Teaching something once doesn't lead to learning
5. Learning often happens despite or in spite of what I do
6. Sometimes what I think is *just not right* - e.g. my own learning of Italian, my decades-long blind faith in explicit teaching of language
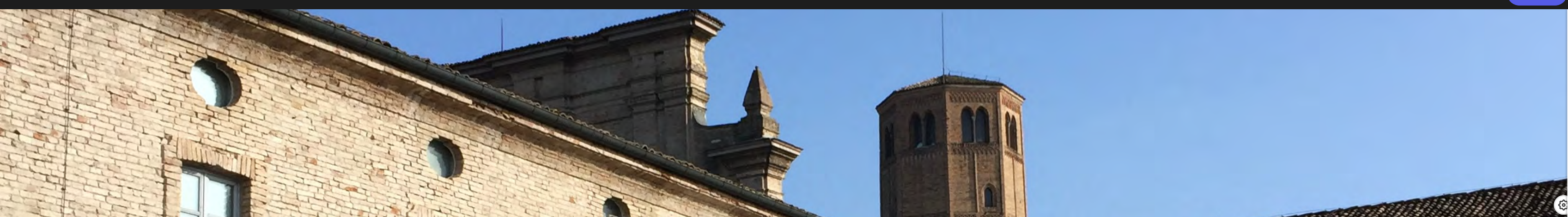
What can applied linguistics tell us?

Henshaw & Hawkins (2022) *Common ground: Second language acquisition theory goes to the classroom* - **...are we all on the same page with respect to what acquisition is?** (p. 3); **The frustration that comes with not seeing improvement in terms of accuracy is usually because we are guilty of rushing a very slow and complex process... And you can't hurry love or acquisition** (p. 191)

Lightbown & Spada (2021) *How languages are learned* 5e - **Classroom-based research on L2 learning and teaching has given us partial answers to many questions** (p. 224)

http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles.php?cat=6

What do we know or turning the world upside down

- **Comprehensible input** is the raw material needed for language acquisition (theory independent)
- **No evidence** that explicit teaching leads to implicit knowledge
- Practising speaking/writing **does not improve** speaking/writing
- **Second language anxiety** is real

VanPatten, Smith & Benati (2020) *Key questions in second language acquisition* Cambridge

From Henshaw & Hawkins (2022)

What counts as input	What doesn't count as in book
Students are given 10 steps to a recipe, but in the wrong order. They are told to put the sentence is in the right order and finally guess what dish the recipe is for	Students are told to read a dialogue between a waiter and a customer. Then, they act it out in front of the class
The teacher says (in the target language): "Get up!" Students get up	The teacher shows students examples of formal and informal commands
The teacher describes what their house looks like and shows students three pictures of different houses. Students select the picture that matches the description	The teacher describes what they did last weekend. Students looked confused, so the teacher translates everything into the shared language.
The teacher gives students a map of a town, tells them where they are, and gives them directions (e.g., turn left on Main Street). Students indicate on the map the route and the destination	The teacher plays a song and gives students the lyrics, but with some words missing. Students fill in the blanks with the right words while they listen to the song
The teacher gives students the menus for four different restaurants. Students choose the best one for someone who is a vegetarian, someone on a tight budget, and someone looking to take their significant other on a romantic date	Students match a list of conjugated verbs with their corresponding infinitive forms

Where do I find comprehensible input?

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You are the best resource

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- **use visual cues**: pictures, drawings, charts, objects, etc.
- **use body language**: act things out, make gestures, model instructions, etc.
- **use target-language equivalents**: paraphrase, rephrase, define in simple terms, use a synonym, use related words but avoid long definitions (if too hard, give a quick translation
- **use examples and common associations**: brands, places, famous people, etc.
- **use cognates**: words that look or sound similar in both languages (you might need to write the target language form)
- **slow down and simplify**: this doesn't mean sacrificing grammaticality or speaking unnaturally

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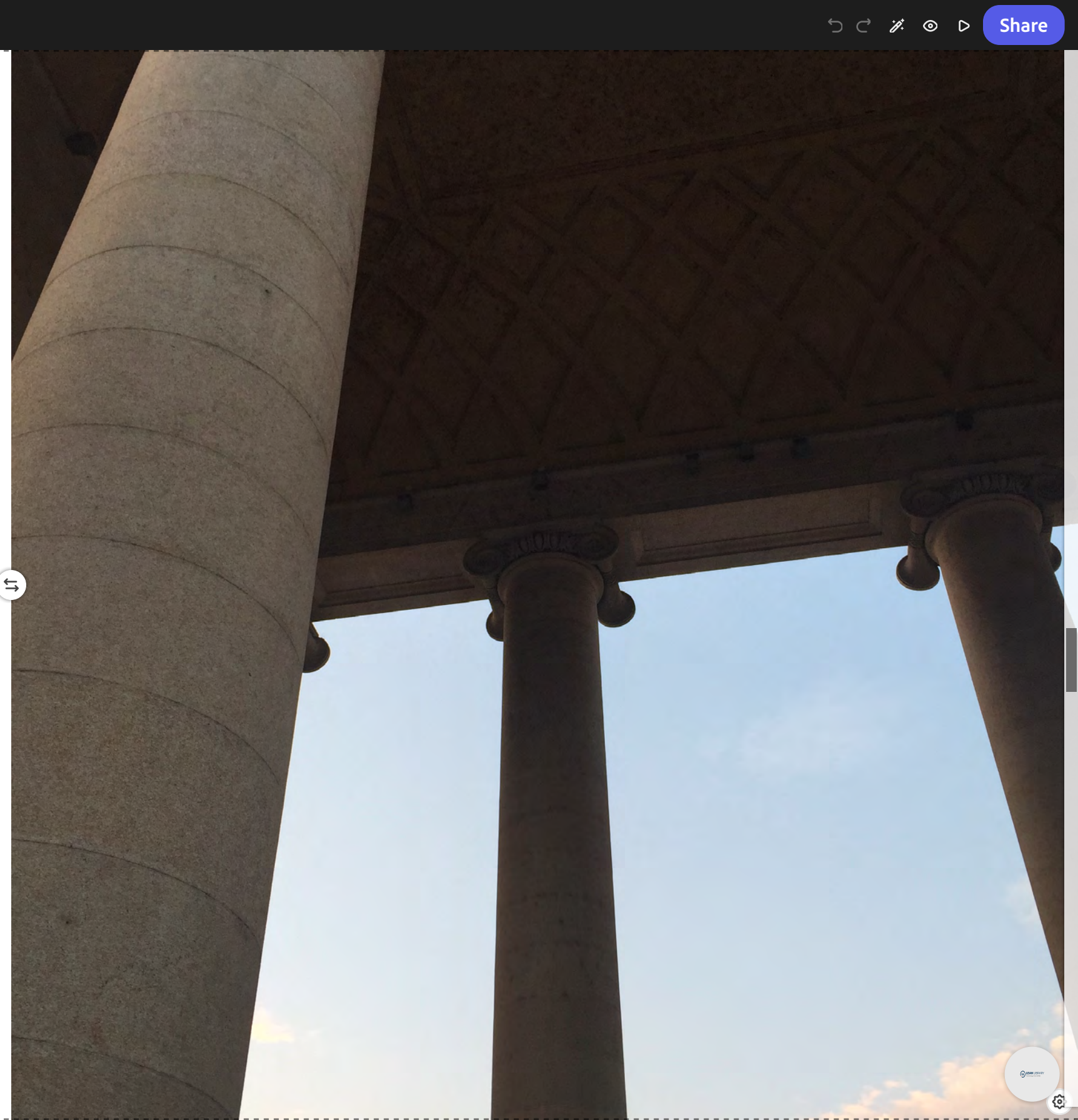
Maximising input: innovating programs

1. Story-listening and comprehensibility

2. Reading – weekly reading log ([Can Second Language Acquirers Reach High Levels of Proficiency Through Self-Selected Reading?](#))

Reading log and journal

Reading log

To ensure a **constant stream** of input in Italian, I want you to use a reading log to track how much you **read each week**.

50% of the mark for the reading log and diary will go to the reading log

This will be evaluated as **pass/fail**

To pass, you need to do the following:

- **Read two (2) short stories or chapters of a novel in Italian each week including the non-instruction week in September - this must be fiction**
- You need to record what you have read including the following details:
  - For online sources: the **full URL** of the short story/book you are reading
  - For book chapters: the **full bibliographical details** of the book (if in print) or the full URL of the copy you are accessing plus the **page numbers** of the chapters you've read
  - For each story/chapter you read, you need to **write a brief summary (= no more than 3 sentences)** in Italian (grammar is not important - just an idea of the content of the story/chapter)
  - *You cannot include in your log the stories/chapters that we look at in lingua 1 and 2*
- Once you've read your two short stories or chapters per week, you can choose any other type of Italian texts (including non-fiction) to add to your reading log - again, including full details
- The suggestions below are a guide - you can choose other things but, remember, you must read **fiction** (not newspaper or magazine articles, blogs, etc.)

Assessment

- To achieve a pass you need to record 26 short summaries with bibliographical details by the end of semester (13 weeks x 2 stories/chapters)
- I will monitor your progress in weeks 4 and 8 and then at the end of semester

Cose da leggere

Add a caption

Reading log, settimana 7

Neil Gaiman, Stardust, tradotto da Arnoldo Mondadori, p. 163-197 Capitolo 9Septimus cerca di uccidere la strega, ma lei lo uccide. Tristran torna a Wall per portare Yvaine a Victoria. Scoprono che Yvaine non può attraversare la Barriera, altrimenti si trasformerà...

Continue Reading →

2023/09/10   1

Reading log settimana 9

La leggenda del crisantemohttps://portalebambini.it/storie-autunno-crisantemo/ La madre di una ragazza si ammala e la ragazza va nel bosco a chiedere aiuto al dio della foresta. Il dio le dice di portare una margherita e che sua madre vivrà un anno per...

Continue Reading →

2023/09/23   0

Reading log, settimana 8

Biancanevehttps://www.grimmstories.com specchio magico dice alla regina cattiva che Biancaneve è più bella di lei, e lei si arrabbia così tanto che manda un cacciatore a uccidere Biancaneve nella natura selvaggia. Tuttavia, il cacciatore non la uccide e Biancaneve trova la...

Continue Reading →

2023/09/17   0

3. Reflection – a key ingredient

http://beniko-mason.net/story-listening/

Something else the research tells us: time

Krashen is unequivocal about using **what time we have to provide compelling input**

See Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (2020). Teaching and learning L2 in the classroom: It's about time. *Language Teaching*, 53(4), 422-432.

So, what about grammar?

1. Two questions: Why do we teach grammar? and Is teaching grammar about language acquisition?
2. My experience (supported by research): Students don't need explicit grammar to progress in learning and Not forcing output creates an environment which promotes learning

To finish

I can share two mystical, amazing facts about language acquisition. First, language acquisition is effortless. It involves no energy, no work. All an acquirer has to do is understand messages. Second, language acquisition is involuntary. Given comprehensible input, and a lack of affective barriers, language acquisition will take place. The acquirer has no choice.

Stephen D. Krashen (2003) *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures* Pearson