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THE MOTIVATED CLASSROOM



PRACTICAL INSIGHTS for the LANGUAGES TEACHER

Liam Printer

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Liam Printer hosts **The Motivated Classroom** podcast and is an instructional coach at the International School of Lausanne in Switzerland where he also teaches Spanish and English acquisition classes to students aged 11–18. Liam is an invited lecturer on the PGCE Modern Languages programme with the University of Oxford and with Hibernia College in Ireland. Liam has previously worked on a similar programme for trainee teachers working in international settings through the International School of Geneva and the University of Durham.

Liam's **The Motivated Classroom** podcast has been downloaded more than half a million times by language teachers in over 100 different countries and has received over 300 five-star reviews to date. The podcast was listed in the Top 5% most downloaded podcasts across all industries and sectors in 2022.

Liam's Doctorate in Education focused on motivating language learners through co-created storytelling. He also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in the teaching of foreign languages and a Masters in Second Language Acquisition.

Liam has been the keynote speaker for a variety of international language teaching conferences including the Association for Language Learning national conference in the UK, the Agen Conference in France and the New Zealand association of Language Teachers. He has also worked as an educational consultant and workshop leader with schools, districts and teachers in over 15 different countries and systems.

Liam's research has been published in various peer-reviewed journals and his work has been cited extensively by other motivation and language teaching researchers around the world.

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Finally, thank you to Dr Bill VanPatten and Dr Richard Ryan for writing such powerful forewords for this book. Authors of hundreds of books, chapters and academic papers, and with tens of thousands of citations to their names, spanning over 40 years, these are two genuine leaders in the fields of language acquisition and motivation. I greatly appreciate the time they gave to this book considering their many other commitments.

Bill VanPatten is one of the most influential figures in modern second language acquisition, particularly known for his groundbreaking work on input processing and processing instruction.

Richard Ryan, alongside Edward Deci, co-founded one of the most powerful theories of motivation in psychology: Self-Determination Theory. To have him write a foreword grounded in the very theory that underpins so much of this book means more than I can properly put into words here.

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Dr Bill VanPatten ix

Foreword by Dr Richard Ryan x

Preface xii

Featured in this book xv

Introduction xxiv

Chapter 1: Motivation 1

Self-Determination Theory 4

Creating the conditions for motivation 21

Activity 1.1 The disgusting milkshake 31

Activity 1.2 The Class Constitution 34

Chapter 2: Inclusion 37

Identity 41

Representation 52

Belonging 61

Activity 2.1: Multilingual reading 72

Activity 2.2: The CI Class Yearbook 75

SAMPLE COPY

Chapter 3: Acquisition 79

The *input hypothesis* 81

Input through listening 99

Input through reading 103

Fluency through spontaneous output 107

Confidence through scaffolded output 112

Activity 3.1: Circling 118

Activity 3.2: Personalised questions and answers (PQA) 121

Chapter 4: Engagement 125

Secure attention 128

Use stories 141

Co-create narratives together 162

Activity 4.1: The Invisible Character 172

Activity 4.2: The reading diary 175

Conclusion: 179

Bibliography 189

Appendix of CI terms 201

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Chapter 3 – Acquisition

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CHAPTER 3:

ACQUISITION

Developing our understanding of how language is acquired is essential knowledge for us as language teachers. There is widespread consensus among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers that, while acquisition is complex, the central role of input remains unequivocal. The SLA voices in this chapter provide the evidence base and rationale for a language classroom that prioritises compelling, comprehensible input through reading and listening, leading to natural language acquisition for our learners.

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Roisín: The language isn't sticking

While Roisín has started to think more carefully and deliberately about planning her French lessons with motivation and inclusion in mind, she often ends up going back to many of her tried and tested teaching techniques when it comes to covering the curriculum. She has seen an uptick in her students' motivation, and she feels her materials are now more diverse and representative of her student body, but she still sees that her students are not retaining much language. Roisín carefully plans her units around the target grammar structures, and she has created excellent worksheets on each topic. No matter how clearly she explains the concepts though, she notices that students continue to make errors with even the simplest grammar terms. This is true in their speaking and writing and they still seem very reluctant to speak the language out loud in class. It feels like they are overthinking everything they say.

Roisín is trying to use the target language more, but she feels like she must explain the grammar in English so they will understand. This inevitably means she ends up speaking a lot of English in class as the students have so many questions. Roisín finds many of the cultural readings she uses from the textbook to be really interesting, but her students don't seem to engage with them like she thought they would. They frequently become frustrated at not understanding all the words and nuances in the text even though Roisín tells them this struggle is good for language learning. Her main problem though, is that the students just can't seem to retain or remember the vocabulary they cover in class. She teaches with lots of games, crosswords and competitions in class but the outcome is the same. She is feeling frustrated that despite the increase in motivation, they still make so many mistakes overall and she ends up going back to English to explain all their errors frequently in class.

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Roisín's core desire is to help her students to become proficient and confident communicators in the target language. This is what really matters to her, and she is becoming frustrated because this isn't happening yet. Until now, Roisín has mainly focused on language *learning* and not so much on language *acquisition*. This isn't a deliberate move or one she is even overly conscious of, she is just doing what most of us do as language educators – teaching the language in the same way that worked for us when we were in school. While closely related, language *learning* and language *acquisition* are not the same thing. Language learning refers to the conscious study of rules, patterns, vocabulary lists and structures. Explicit knowledge about components of the language we can explain and test directly. Language acquisition is largely an unconscious process, where language becomes part of our mental system through repeated, meaningful exposure. With language acquisition, we pick up language structures implicitly and naturally through no conscious effort. Every human is uniquely capable of this monumental task. We have all done it already with our first language through reading (or being read to) and listening to huge amounts of input that was both comprehensible and interesting enough for us to want to pay attention. The miracle of exactly how our underdeveloped brains can achieve this in just a few years is still mostly unexplained. There is, however, widespread agreement in the SLA field around one necessary component in the process: comprehensible input. To acquire language the way our brains were built to do, requires input. An abundance of rich, interesting and understandable input.

The *input hypothesis*

The idea of input flooding is at the heart of Dr Stephen Krashen's *input hypothesis* (1981, 1982, 1985, 1989). One of the most cited, and divisive, figures in SLA research, Krashen's work is among the most influential and most debated ideas in language teaching.

Krashen (1982) states that we acquire language when we understand messages slightly above our current level and when those messages are compelling enough to hold our attention. Krashen refers to this as *i+1*. The 'i' represents our current level of competence in the language, and the '+1' is the next small step beyond that. The central point is to constantly push learners with language that is just within reach when supported by context, visuals, tone and prior knowledge. When Krashen joined me on the podcast he reiterated his position that acquisition is driven by comprehensible input, and that, as language teachers, it is incumbent on

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us to provide as much of this type of input as possible during our limited class time with students:

> Dr Stephen Krashen:
>
> *Comprehensible input is key. Language acquisition happens through input. It's important to know about it and use it in class because in language classes, you can get the comprehensible input that the outside world will only reluctantly supply you if you're a beginner. Teaching this way makes life easier for you and more pleasant for the students. It also increases the likelihood that they're going to get better, improve and become proficient.*
>
> Episode 83, The Motivated Classroom

While Krashen has successfully shaped classroom practice around the world, his hypotheses have also been hotly debated and criticised in the SLA field. At the heart of the debate is Krashen's central claim that comprehensible input alone is sufficient for language acquisition, and that output, interaction and explicit grammar study, while potentially useful, are not necessary components of the process (Krashen, 1981; 1982). It is this position, more than any other, that provoked the strongest responses. Critics argued that Krashen's hypotheses underestimated the important contribution of output and interaction in pushing learners towards greater precision and communicative ability. Academics also highlighted that his hypotheses, while compelling and consistent with broader evidence, were difficult to test in empirically rigorous ways.

In 2021, SLA researchers VanPatten and Lichtman revisited these debates and examined both the critiques and the enduring value of Krashen's ideas in a wide-ranging paper entitled 'Was Krashen right? 40 years later', arguing that many of the original objections no longer stand, in light of the accumulated research evidence (Lichtman and VanPatten, 2021). They joined me together for an extended interview on the podcast to discuss their findings for what has now become one of the most listened-to episodes of the entire catalogue. Dr Bill VanPatten, a world-renowned SLA author and researcher, whose work has been cited in academic literature over 30,000 times, was uncompromising about where the field now stands in relation to the role of input for acquisition:

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Dr Bill VanPatten

In science, you accumulate evidence over time, and over time, that evidence is so overwhelming, that you say, 'that is a fact'. Since 1978, when Krashen first talked about language acquisition and learning, you can now see that the evidence is kind of overwhelming. We need input for acquisition. That's just a fact.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

In the paper, Lichtman and VanPatten highlight that while the construct of *i+1* was criticised as vague and unmeasurable (Gregg, 1984; Spolsky, 1985), the fundamental claim that acquisition is driven by comprehensible input has been validated repeatedly. They emphasise that all major theories of SLA now recognise input as the essential data source for acquisition, albeit under different terms, such as 'communicatively embedded input' or 'primary linguistic data'. This updated terminology for Krashen's core ideas was supported by Dr Karen Lichtman, Adjunct Lecturer of Spanish and Linguistics at Binghamton University, on the podcast. Lichtman highlighted that the real problem is that the profession often swings between extremes: treating Krashen as either beyond reproach or declaring him irrelevant:

Dr Karen Lichtman

Some teachers say 'Krashen is great and everything Krashen says is the best'. Those people run the risk of looking out of date. Then other people say 'Oh no, Krashen has been discredited. We don't talk about Krashen anymore'. The truth is what Krashen said was exactly right. Now we just talk about it using new and updated terminology.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

In their paper, the authors conclude that although the notion of *i+1* is difficult to operationalise, 'the principal data for the acquisition of language is found in the communicatively embedded comprehensible input that learners receive' and that it is necessary to come before production (Lichtman and VanPatten, 2021, p. 296). So, while Krashen's (1982) ideas have been criticised, debated and refined over time, the substantial accumulated evidence for the central role of input is now

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widely accepted in the SLA field (VanPatten, Smith and Benati, 2024). VanPatten underscored this fundamental tenet of comprehensible input being central to language acquisition during our interview:

> Dr Bill VanPatten
>
> *If you look at Krashen's core hypotheses from the 80s, they are literally undisputed now in the 2020s. One is the fundamental role of input for acquisition, which is the foundation of the* input hypothesis*.*
>
> Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Whether input *alone* is enough to reach proficiency is where there is ongoing debate between SLA academics and one that is central to much of the contemporary SLA investigations. Researchers such as Ronald Leow, Paul Nation and Frank Boers, for example, argue for the value of explicit learning in the language classroom. Nonetheless, when you begin to explore such SLA research that places more value on explicit instruction, it becomes immediately apparent that almost every SLA research paper will refer to and bring in Krashen's ideas in one way or another. It is undeniable that our current understanding of how language is acquired, and the associated research fields that provide evidence for this knowledge, owe a huge amount to Krashen and his original ideas and theories from the 1980s. VanPatten made explicit reference to this idea on the podcast:

> Dr Bill VanPatten
>
> *People need to understand that you really don't do second language acquisition today, in any field, or any subfield of it, without somehow being traced back to Stephen Krashen's ideas.*
>
> Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Krashen's greatest contribution, however, is that his theory and the subsequent supporting research have managed to cut through and reach the everyday classroom teacher in ways that other theories have never managed to do (Lightbrown, 2019). Even Krashen's fiercest critics (Liu, 2015) state that his work should be lauded for its impact on classroom practices, moving away from rule-focused, grammar-based approaches, to methods centred on communication and meaning (Lightbown and

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Spada, 2006). As esteemed language learner motivation researcher Zoltan Dörnyei highlighted: Krashen 'undoubtedly succeeded' where most other language acquisition theories have failed in 'bridging the gap between linguistic theory and actual language teaching' (1991).

Much of the SLA research doesn't ever filter down to teachers and their students as it is too complex and hard to translate into practical classroom strategies. Whereas, with Krashen's work, a whole branch of CI techniques have emerged among practitioners who now understand the central importance of comprehensible input in the classroom for natural language acquisition to occur. A selection of these CI techniques, whose core purpose is to provide more interest and understandable input to learners, are featured in more detail in chapter 4 and in the classroom activities section at the end of each chapter.

Language acquisition is largely implicit

Revisiting Krashen's (1982) acquisition–learning distinction, Lichtman and VanPatten concluded that acquisition is mostly an implicit process and this position is now widely supported across SLA research. In their 2021 paper, they note that while critics such as Gregg (1984) and McLaughlin (1978) challenged the operationalisation of the acquisition-learning distinction, contemporary psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic research consistently supports a clear division between implicit and explicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005; Rebuschat, 2015; Ullman, 2001). VanPatten drew the listeners' attention to this important finding during our interview on the podcast too:

> Dr Bill VanPatten
>
> *The acquisition-learning distinction is now widely accepted; essentially the distinction between implicit and explicit* knowledge *and implicit and explicit* learning*. The psychological literature now is overwhelmingly coming to the consensus that language learning is largely implicit.*
>
> Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Language acquisition being largely implicit and achieved through comprehensible and compelling input is something that has important implications for our classroom practice. While games, drills and worksheets can still play a minor role in classroom activities, Roisín now understands that she needs to prioritise the place of interesting input in her classroom

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so as to maximise natural language acquisition. Dr Florencia Henshaw, SLA author and researcher, also reiterated that language acquisition being an implicit process is an important concept for language teachers to keep in mind when planning their lessons:

Dr Florencia Henshaw

Most scholars, if not all, agree that acquiring a language is mostly implicit, meaning that you cannot consciously control it. That's important for the classroom.

Episode 55, The Motivated Classroom

Even when input is delivered in ways we believe are clear and compelling, learners will not all acquire the same pieces of language from it. Each student is taking what they are ready for from the input as each learner's path is distinct. As language teachers, we have to accept that when we centre the learning around providing an abundance of rich comprehensible input in class, we won't know which precise words or phrases the learner has fully acquired. As VanPatten reminded us, language acquisition is a messy and complex process that looks different for everyone:

Dr Bill VanPatten

The learner is taking bits and pieces of data from the input. And you have no idea, as a teacher, what those bits and pieces are.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Given that language acquisition is largely implicit and uncontrollable, this also means that it does not fit into typical explicit assessment standards. In an education system that is built around teaching something and then testing it, this can be a difficult phenomenon for teachers to let go of. The fact that acquisition is unconscious and uncontrollable may be what sits most uncomfortably with teachers and may be the reason why acquisition and input-driven instruction has not penetrated more classrooms. Modern educational policy continues to try to force language education into a rigid unit planner and subject box as if it were chemistry or maths or geography instead of following the research around how language is actually acquired. While many of us work in school systems that tell us to simply teach some language and then test it, VanPatten reminded us that language acquisition does not work like this:

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Dr Bill VanPatten

We have to jettison the idea that language instruction should be like other subject matter. We need our national organisations to buy into that idea that if we're truly going for proficiency and acquisition, we can't force language education to fit in with other subjects and their criteria.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

When we try to make language teaching work in the same way as other school subjects, we run into a fundamental problem. Most academic disciplines depend heavily on conscious, deliberate, explicit learning and memorisation of facts and rules. However, much of what 'works' for teaching science or history will not work in the same way in the language classroom. Language acquisition is largely implicit, happens subconsciously without us knowing and is therefore a fundamentally different process driven by a combination of input, internal mechanisms for acquiring language and, of course, motivation to acquire another language. Nonetheless, much of the traditional content in textbooks continues to treat language acquisition as if it were a subject based on factual recall so that it fits inside our rigid curriculum and assessment constraints. As VanPatten reminded us, reframing school-based language instruction around the science of acquisition would require a dramatic overhaul of the current standards-based system:

Dr Bill VanPatten

If you start questioning explicit learning and grammar-driven instruction, then the neat little categories and institutionalised education for languages goes out the window.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

It would also mean the collapse of the language-learning textbook industry as almost every textbook follows the same pattern where the language is broken up into thematic vocabulary units and sequenced grammar forms. This, however, is not what drives acquisition. Not only does the traditional, textbook-led language teaching approach not align with how language is acquired, decades of research in this area shows that it is also found to be demotivating, boring and too difficult for most language learners (Lamb,

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2017). Yet, these resources continue to dictate the sequencing and focus of most language classrooms around the world. We teach in ways that suit the textbook, the test or the timetable, rather than in ways that reflect how humans acquire language. As Krashen pointed out, however, moving away from thematic units and towards an input-drive approach is not in the financial interests of major textbook publishers, so it is unlikely to change any time soon:

> Dr Stephen Krashen
>
> *The* input hypothesis *now being accepted as a fact is a major disaster for the entire foreign language textbook publishing industry worldwide. It means [their materials] are suddenly obsolete and a lot of grammar book producers are going to have to find another way of making a living.*
>
> Episode 83, The Motivated Classroom

In these instructional manuals, the language is presented as a set of neat building blocks where each grammatical point becomes progressively more nuanced and difficult. Students start by talking and reading only in the present tense and then add the past and future tenses once they have 'mastered' the present tense irregular verbs and structure. Now, imagine doing that for first language acquisition. Only using the present tense for a year or two, and only presenting vocabulary related to one theme like 'parts of the house' and waiting for the child to master those before ever introducing anything else. Language proficiency would take decades to develop if we did it like this.

Language textbooks often present language as if it can be broken into neat lists, patterns and rules. Language acquisition does not work that way. Children and adults use the same underlying mechanisms to acquire language, and those mechanisms only function through exposure to communicatively embedded input. The difference lies not in the acquisition system, but in the conditions around it. Adults face more social pressure, more cognitive load and the influence of a first language, while children are acquiring language with the here-and-now, through highly contextual input. Essentially, they can just be children. These factors shape the experience of becoming proficient in the language, but they do not change how language is acquired.

Importantly, Krashen's (1982) *input hypothesis* places meaning ahead of grammatical form. It tells us that while conscious study of grammar and

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vocabulary can help with understanding how a language works, it is the repeated experience of hearing or reading meaningful, understandable messages that actually builds the mental representation of the language in the brain (Krashen, 1985; VanPatten, 1987). As Henshaw pointed out, the mechanics and rules of the language are so central in these textbooks, that meaning and understanding become sidelined:

> Dr Florencia Henshaw
>
> *A lot of language textbooks are so much focused on the grammar form to the point that the meaning becomes secondary. It shouldn't be that way. Acquisition is very much dependent on meaning.*
>
> Episode 55, The Motivated Classroom

While it would be lovely if language acquisition worked in such a linear and incremental fashion, the reality is so much more complex than this. The abstract way learners take in and internalise language was highlighted repeatedly by Lichtman on the episode. She stressed that we cannot predict or fully control the process of acquisition, as the mental representation of language that students are building is not tangible or easily observed. Learners do not all move at the same pace, and they do not all reach the same level. That does not, however, mean they acquire language in different ways. The basic process is the same for everyone: language develops through meaningful input. What changes is the learner's situation, including the amount of input, the context and the pressures they face. Lichtman reminded us that the key is to keep flooding the class with interesting input and gradually the individual pieces of the language puzzle will start to form a coherent map in their minds:

> Dr Karen Lichtman
>
> *What we're dealing with is this very intangible thing that learners are building in their heads. The fact is that language acquisition is just so abstract and complex.*
>
> Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Accepting that language acquisition is complex and non-linear also means accepting that it cannot be hurried. Just as the intervention of motivational, autonomy-supportive strategies in the classroom will eventually result

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in higher intrinsic motivation, providing more interesting input in class will eventually lead to more acquisition. In the contemporary education system, there is a temptation to push for visible results and rush students towards production, but acquisition takes time. A lot of time and a lot of input. While grammar instruction may be the quickest way to see tangible results on the page, what we actually need to be doing is using as much of our class time as possible to provide interesting and compelling, comprehensible input. This is the only way that learners can build a solid and stable base of implicit knowledge of the language, a point supported by Lichtman on the podcast:

Dr Karen Lichtman

We want to minimise explicit grammar instruction because developing the implicit knowledge is so important. And because it takes so much time that that is what we need to use our class time for.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Henshaw also spoke to this issue on the podcast. She reiterated the core message that we need to understand that language acquisition is slow and complicated. It happens at a different pace for everyone, and we can't control that. What we can do, as language teachers, is be patient and trust the process of input-driven acquisition. Keep providing students with the interesting input they need to form the language in their heads, then we can start to explain the individual parts of the language. Not the other way around. These were ideas that Henshaw came back to repeatedly on her episode of the podcast:

Dr Florencia Henshaw

Everything in language acquisition tells us that it is slow, it is very complex. We want it to be: 'Well, here's the explanation. Now you can use it', or 'Here's the vocabulary. Now let's use it for a dialogue'. It just doesn't work that way.

Episode 55, The Motivated Classroom

Despite the evidence base and research, school-based language classes around the world continue to focus much more on language *learning,* with a heavy emphasis on explicit rules and accuracy, rather than on language *acquisition*, which is built through communicatively embedded comprehensible input.

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This tension between how policy expects languages to be taught and what the research says about how language is acquired is one that teachers feel every day. As we saw in Roisín's story at the beginning of this chapter, our education systems reward quick, measurable gains. In such systems, even teachers who understand the central role of input inevitably become pushed back towards a 'teach it then test it' approach in the classroom, where accuracy, precision and grammatical nuance take precedence over communicative competence. As VanPatten reminds us, language acquisition happens when learners are exposed to communicatively embedded input. The process is unconscious; learners do not acquire language by studying rules, verb tables or conjugation exercises. Communication may involve social norms, human connection and purposeful interaction, but language itself is not the same thing as communication:

> Dr Bill VanPatten
>
> *If you think that language is verbs, grammar and subject agreement – you're going to think you can teach the same old things through comprehensible input. That is the underlying problem. Getting communicatively embedded input and making it comprehensible in the classroom is* not *about teaching rules. It's not even teaching vocab. It's about communication. We're not* teaching *anything through input. Each learner is taking bits and pieces of data from the input and as a teacher you have no idea what those bits and pieces are.*
>
> Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

The key point is that comprehensible input builds the foundation of implicit knowledge, or what VanPatten later called the 'mental representation of language', upon which explicit knowledge about the mechanics of the language can be added. Without this strong base in mind, explicit instruction has little to anchor it to long-term learning. VanPatten argued this as early as 1987 in his paper 'On Babies and Bathwater: Input in Foreign Language Learning', making the case that grammar instruction should not be foundational but should instead follow substantial exposure to meaningful input (VanPatten, 1987). His later work with Cadierno similarly supports the view that grammar instruction is best approached through structured input and processing rather than as the basis of the language classroom (VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993). During our interview, VanPatten identified what he sees as the central problem: the assumption that explicit grammar study builds acquired language:

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Dr Bill VanPatten

What the research is not showing us, is any connection between explicit and implicit language learning. What framework is there that can somehow convert explicit information into some kind of implicit knowledge? Or what is the mechanism by which explicit knowledge somehow aids implicit knowledge? There is no framework. No theory has such a mechanism.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

Language learning is largely explicit

So, what does all this mean for our beloved grammar lessons that we all hold so dear to our hearts as language-loving nerds? Should we completely stop 'language learning', the explicit instruction *about* the language, and concentrate only on 'language acquisition'? Not quite. Focusing your classroom practice on the accepted SLA principle of the need for an abundance of input does *not* equate to an argument against grammar instruction. There is a common misconception that an acquisition-driven classroom ignores grammar instruction entirely or treats it as unimportant. That is not the case. Grammar still has a place in the classroom, but it is not the starting point, and it is not what drives acquisition. In an acquisition-rich classroom, the main focus is on comprehensible and interesting input, with attention to grammar used carefully and selectively to support meaning and form meaningful connections.

While VanPatten argues that explicit grammar study does not turn into acquired, usable language, both he and Lichtman advocated for short grammar explanations in context in order to develop meaning in the input, during their joint episode on the podcast. Many of the teachers who appeared on the podcast also highlighted the benefits of short, in-the-moment, 'pop-up grammar' explanations while learners are immersed in the input. For example, in a beginner's story we may come across the plural version of some nouns. In these cases, and especially when students ask about it, it is a good thing to briefly explain why there is an -s on those words. Then, we go straight back to the story. Essentially, we teach grammar in context when it is necessary to help to understand the input. As Lichtman pointed out, when grammar is addressed, it can be done in a way that keeps meaning at the centre:

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Dr Karen Lichtman

Pop-up grammar definitely has a place [in the classroom] as it is comprehension-based. You are helping the students to map it correctly onto meaning in their brain. It is more beneficial than production-based grammar teaching, where you're just conjugating verbs or whatever, because you're helping students understand the meaning in the input they're hearing.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

This approach fits naturally into an acquisition-focused classroom, where grammar supports comprehension instead of distracting from it. Grammar teaching is best seen as a support for meaning and fluency rather than as the foundation. When it is delayed, delivered in context and kept brief, grammar can help clarify meaning without derailing the flow of input. Crisfield also spoke about grammar in a similar light, explaining that it always needs to be taught in relation to communication rather than as an isolated topic, as this is what leads to disengagement with many students:

Dr Eowyn Crisfield

I'm a big advocate of teaching grammar, absolutely, but we teach grammar in the service of communication and connection. We don't teach grammar in an isolated bubble because that's what turns students of all ages off it.

Episode 101, The Motivated Classroom

As students become more advanced with their implicit knowledge and mental representation of the language, so too can the lessons on grammar. For example, in a beginner or low intermediate lesson, specific grammar teaching might look something like:

- Point out the grammar in the input → short explanation → move on with the input → continue to notice and highlight that grammar point as you come across it in the input.

Whereas in an advanced lesson, where students have already had years of input and already built a language system in their heads, grammar teaching might look more like:

1 Point out the grammar in the input → short explanation → move on with the input.

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2 Students begin to notice and highlight the grammar point in the input → teacher provides a more in-depth explanation → students write the rule/pattern in their notes → students complete some explicit exercises on that grammar point.

3 Students notice it in the input again → students create language related to the input but explicitly focusing on using that grammar point → feedback and correction.

As you can see, accepting that input is the principle driving force of acquisition does not mean that grammatical accuracy is not important. The key is *when* to bring in those longer grammar explanations and lessons, not *if*. Explicit grammar instruction should come later, much later, in the acquisition process, once students have built the linguistic system in their minds through lots of rich and meaningful input. This is the core point: In a CI classroom teachers do teach grammar, but they do not teach it *first*. They do not make grammar, verb tables and conjugations the starting point on which everything else is built. As Henshaw often says, teachers need to 'build the system' of language in the learners' heads first. Once our students have already had hours upon hours of rich, compelling and understandable input, then, and only then, do we zoom into the explicit grammar exercises. While grammar teaching can feel efficient because it produces quick, visible results on narrow, discrete-point grammar tests, those results are minimal and fade without a base of implicit knowledge. During our episode, Lichtman pointed to a striking piece of research that makes this case for delaying grammar instruction clearly:

Dr Karen Lichtman

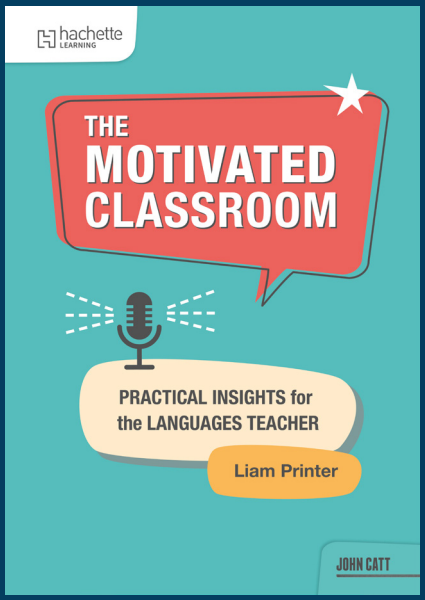
The thing about exclusively teaching grammar is that it works really fast. You can actually spend very little time on it and see the benefits that you're going to see from it – benefits which are however, very, very minimal; meaning you should devote almost all of your time to implicit teaching. There's an article called 'The Icing On the Cake?: Effects of Explicit Form-Focused Instruction after Two Years of Implicit EFL Learning' [Piggott, L., Tribushinina, E. and de Graaf, R., 2020]. They had children learn English with totally implicit methods for two years. At the end, they then spent six hours on grammar. Those students had as good a grammar as the students who did grammar all the time. And of course ... much better fluency. So, if you are going to do grammar, do less of it and do it later. Save the grammar for the last few weeks of school.

Episode 50, The Motivated Classroom

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