

THE ROLE OF *i+1* IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: MAKING INPUT JUST CHALLENGING ENOUGH

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Introductions. One of the key questions in language teaching is: *How can we help learners move from what they already know to the next level?* In other words, how do we ensure steady progress without overwhelming students? One influential answer comes from linguist Stephen Krashen, who introduced the concept of *i+1* in his Input Hypothesis, part of his broader theory of second language acquisition.

The “i” in *i+1* stands for the learner’s current level of language knowledge—what they already understand and can use. The “+1” represents new language – vocabulary, grammar, or structure – that is just slightly beyond that level. According to Krashen, this slightly more advanced input should still be comprehensible. Learners do not need to understand every word, but they should be able to grasp the main idea with the help of context, visuals, tone, or prior knowledge.

Aim. The aim of this paper is to explain the *i+1* principle in the context of second language acquisition, explore its theoretical background, and provide real-world examples. The paper also aims to demonstrate how this concept supports student motivation, ensures continuous progress, and aligns with learner-centered approaches in language teaching.

Materials and methods. This article is based on a combination of theoretical research and practical classroom experience. Examples come from English lessons with adult learners, based on classroom observations, teacher lesson plans, student feedback, and linguistic tasks designed to assess learner progress. Sources also include Krashen's original work and subsequent academic discussions of the Input Hypothesis.

Result and discussion. Krashen's Input Hypothesis proposes that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input – language that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. The concept of *i+1* reflects this idea: “i” represents the learner’s existing ability, and “+1” denotes input that includes new, yet understandable, elements. According to Krashen, language acquisition is most effective when learners infer meaning from context rather than through explicit grammar instruction. The hypothesis emphasizes natural language development through meaningful exposure, influencing communicative and input-based methodologies worldwide.

Practical Implementation of i+1. To illustrate *i+1* in practice, consider a learner who understands and can say, “I live in a small town.” An *i+1* version might be, “I live in a small town near the mountains.” The phrase “near the mountains” introduces new vocabulary or structure while maintaining overall comprehensibility. This slight challenge promotes acquisition.

In another example, students may start with, “She eats lunch at 1 o'clock.” A teacher might extend this to, “She usually eats lunch at 1 p.m., but today she is eating at 2 p.m.” This sentence introduces adverbs of frequency, present continuous tense, and contrastive meaning within a comprehensible context.

Using Context to Support Comprehension. A central strength of *i+1* is that new language is embedded in familiar contexts. Teachers can use gestures, visuals, realia, or multimedia to make input understandable. For example, in a lesson about food, students who know words like “apple,” “milk,” and “bread” can learn “carrot” and “cheese” through images and situational cues. Similarly, during a listening task on daily routines, students familiar with “wake up,” “go to work,” and “eat breakfast” can be introduced to new terms like “commute,” “check emails,” or “attend a meeting” through context.

Classroom Applications. Effective use of *i+1* requires careful material selection and lesson design. Teachers should aim to provide input that matches learners' current level while including elements that slightly extend their abilities. Practical strategies include:

- adapting reading passages to include new vocabulary in a familiar context;
- asking follow-up questions that require more complex language use;
- introducing one or two new lexical or grammatical items per lesson;
- scaffolding tasks to support learners in interpreting and using new language.

In one of my own classes, a short video with basic dialogues was followed by a reading text on the same topic. Most language was familiar, but several new expressions were introduced. Students used context clues to infer meanings and later applied these expressions in speaking tasks. This small, structured challenge increased both engagement and confidence.

Differentiation and Learner Needs. Because each student has a different “i,” effective application of *i+1* often requires differentiated instruction. Visual aids, scaffolding techniques, graded texts, and flexible group work help ensure all learners are appropriately challenged. Teachers must be sensitive to learners' current proficiency and design tasks that offer individualized opportunities for language growth.

Conclusions. Krashen's *i+1* principle offers a powerful framework for fostering natural and sustainable second language development. It maintains an ideal balance between challenge and comprehensibility, enabling learners to progress without being overwhelmed. By embedding new language in meaningful, context-rich input, teachers can support motivation, confidence, and effective acquisition.

Rather than focusing on explicit grammar instruction or memorization, *i+1* encourages intuitive learning through exposure. When thoughtfully implemented, it serves as a practical and adaptable strategy in diverse classroom settings. For these reasons, *i+1* continues to be a cornerstone of modern second language teaching.