How the Comprehension Hypothesis Makes Life Easier: Developing Academic Language   Stephen Krashen   www.sdkrashen.com

I. The new focus on Academic Language Proficiency = vocabulary, grammar, and
   discourse style of academic, or professional language.
A. traditional approach: describe academic language, prepare materials, teach it (English
   for Special Purposes, ESP; English for Academic Purposes).
B. My view: This has never worked. What works: (1) massive free voluntary reading,
   then (2) motivated academic reading for your own interests.

I. Two views of language/literacy development
A. The comprehension hypothesis: we acquire language when we understand it.
1. grammar, vocabulary = RESULT of language acquisition
2. pleasant immediately
A. The skill building hypothesis: first learn about language, practice rules
1. grammar, vocabulary learned first, then you can use the language
2. delayed gratification (that never arrives)

I.   A special case of the comprehension hypothesis: the reading hypothesis - reading is
     the source of our reading ability, writing ability (writing style), vocabulary, spelling,
     grammar competence.
Most powerful form = free voluntary reading (FVR)

IV. Support for the comprehension hypothesis
1. method comparison studies: beginning, intermediate, self-selected reading
2. correlational studies: more CI/FVR > more language/literacy development
3. Serious problems with skill-building:
acquisition without conscious learning
scarcity of correction, output
complexity
4. conscious learning not useless but very limited

V. Development of academic language: Stage One - self-selected reading (pre-academic
stage); the bridge from conversation to academic language
1. Biber (1988): fiction falls between conversation and academic texts in terms of
linguistic complexity
2. SSR studies - SSR better on tests of academic language (reading, vocabulary, writing,
grammatical accuracy): true for children, teenagers, and university students, first and
second language
1. Multivariate analyses: rival hypotheses in direct competition!!
a) Spanish as a foreign language for English speakers - test of subjunctive was "monitor-
   free";
Reading (FVR) only significant predictor!

Competence in the subjunctive in Spanish as foreign language in the US

predictor	Beta	p
study	0.0052	0.72
residence	0.051	0.73
reading	0.32	0.034
subjunctive study	0.045	0.76

From: Stokes, Krashen & Kartchner, 1998

b) TOEFL test

Predictors of TOEFL scores: multiple regression (EFL)

predictor	beta
extracurricular reading	0.53
native speaker teacher	0.43
total instruction	-0.21
extracurricular speaking	-0.2

From: Gradman & Hanania, 1991

Predictors of TOEFL scores: multiple regression (ESL)

predictor	beta
free reading/books read	0.41
English study in home country	0.48
Length of residence in US	0.42

From: Constantino, Lee, Cho & Krashen, 1997

i) English writing performance, EFL in Taiwan (SY Lee, 2005)
Significant predictors: FVR
Not significant: amount of free writing; strong belief in instruction

4. The TOEFL study (Mason, 2006): gains in TOEFL scores from FVR alone = 3.5
pts/wk = full time TOEFL prep course, gains on all sections (listening, grammar, reading)
5. Narrow reading: one author, one genre ....
Lamme, 1976: good readers do more narrow reading
KS Cho: the Sweet Valley studies.
From Sweet Valley Kids (reading level: grade 2) > Sweet Valley Twins (grade 4) >
Sweet Valley High (grades 5,6)
6. Another case history: comic books > baseball stories > science fiction, all very narrow

VI.Stage Two: Narrow Academic Reading
1. stage 1 (pre-academic) provides linguistic, knowledge background to make academic input more comprehensible; stage 2 provides academic language competence
1. narrow reading of academic texts, in an area of great personal interest to the reader.
2. Reading as the main source, not classroom input (Biber, 2006: classroom discourse is closer to conversational language than to academic language).
3. A case history: works of Chomsky, in chronological order > small area of brain research (dichotic listening); work of single author > other areas of brain research > language acquisition and language education: reading for my purposes, not for "academic purposes."
4. Influence of the first language:
1) some features of academic language similar in different languages
2) background knowledge gained thru L1 makes L2 input more comprehensible

VII. Can academic language proficiency be "learned"?
The complexity problem
Example: Hyland's discussion of "quite"
1) both a "booster" (e.g. "the results were quite phenomenal") and a "hedge" or slight attenuation (e.g. "he couldn't quite do it"),
2) meaning varies with different stress: "I QUITE like the idea of walking" (but I'd prefer not), versus "I quite LIKE the idea of walking" (and maybe I will),
3) and different word order: "a quite beautiful garden" versus "quite a beautiful garden," the former expressing "greater commitment."
Hyland: pedagogical grammars & professional linguists disagree!
SK: those second language acquirers who have better "quite-competence" have read more, especially in self-selected academic texts of personal interest.
Acquisition without learning: ALL CASES of the acquisition of Academic Language
Only a small part of academic language can be consciously learned.