

1. Conference Introduction

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This is the first conference here in Cambridge University dedicated to the topic of Comprehensible Input in ancient languages. I am pleased to say that we have around 40 in-person guests here and around 230 online. This I think shows the extent of interest in the topic and the importance educators are attaching to developing teaching practices and learning experiences which are more in line with how we know that human beings acquire and learn languages.

Cambridge University is the home of the [Cambridge School Classics Project](#), which publishes the *Cambridge Latin Course*. Not far away, towards Haverhill, the [Suburani](#) Latin course is published by *Hands Up Education*. W. H. D. Rouse, the headteacher of the Perse School, just on the other side of this city, at the beginning of the 20th century, started the [Association for the Reform of Latin Teaching](#). The Association is still flourishing and I am pleased that we have one of their representatives – Ana Martin – here today giving us a paper. Cambridge is therefore an excellent place to be talking about the teaching and learning of ancient languages!

I'd like to thank Professor James Warren, then Classics Faculty Head, who last year gave me the go-ahead for running a languages conference here in the Classics Faculty. And thanks must also go to Dr. Rosanna Omitowoju, one of the languages teaching officers here in the Faculty, for being a keen supporter of the conference and a participant in the final discussion – she may not be present all the time as she has another university role to take care of during the day.

I would also thank Alice Case at [Classics for All](#), the UK charity whose ambition is to get Classics Education into more and more state schools, and which has supported us with some financial assistance.

Most of all I'd like to thank Molly Willett, who is the Access and Outreach Coordinator here in Cambridge, and who has been forever at my side working on the complex planning that such a conference requires – especially as it has grown and grown.

Without treading on the presenters' toes, I'd very briefly explain what Comprehensible Input is. Stephen Krashen¹ coined the term back in the 1980s. It was, he says, something that is not purely *his own* theory). The *use of* rather than *knowledge about* the language is the cornerstone. Everyone pretty much agrees with the idea that masses of input in the target language is an essential component of language development. This input is most easily and efficiently achieved through *listening to* and *hearing* messages that *make sense* and are at the *level of the listener* for comprehension – or uptake – to take place. Input can also be *reading* – and this is

¹ Krashen (1982).

perhaps more relevant to the learning of ancient languages, which is why most of our presenters today are going to talk about reading text rather than listening to spoken Latin or Ancient Greek. Most, but not all. If reading is the choice of input, we need to maximise the amount of reading, make sure that it is readable and compelling, so that our readers want to read more, and we need to present the material over time in a carefully structured sequence so that whatever we read at the beginning does not displace the original texts that we want to read in the future, but instead leads up to them. We might choose to optimise the comprehensibility of the reading material in various ways, as our presenters will show.

REFERENCES

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford: Pergamum Press.