

TENETS OF COMPREHENSION-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING  
WITH A FOCUS ON COMMUNICATIVE ABILITY

We hold these facts to be inconvertible.

- Language is an abstract and complex mental representation that bears no resemblance to textbook rules and charts.
- Language acquisition is largely controlled by unconscious mechanisms internal to the learner.
- In order to develop a linguistic system, learners must be exposed to language (input) embedded in communicative events and comprehensible in nature.
- Communication involves the expression, interpretation and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context for a given non-linguistic purpose.
- Communicative ability develops as a result of participation in communicative events.

Given these facts, the following basic principles ought to underlie contemporary language teaching where the focus is on acquisition and the development of communicative ability.

- Expression and/or interpretation of meaning should be at the center of the curriculum. Both should be level appropriate for learners.
- A principal role for instructors is to provide communicatively embedded input.
- The developmental nature of both language acquisition and communicative ability is to be expected and rewarded.
- Except for the development of monitored language use (e.g., written composition), explicit focus on the formal elements of language (i.e., “grammar”) as part of instruction and feedback should be kept to a minimum.
- Assessment of learners should focus on what they can do, not what they know.

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