I am more than happy to be able to share some of our progress with you. This is, as you know, the "The First International Conference on English Language Studies, for the University of Isfahan, and you will see that Iran and even the city of Isfahan plays roles in the work I will discuss.

Before I tell you about the research, let's talk about how you can save some money. Books and journals in the field of language acquisition have become expensive. In fact, my colleague Jeff McQuillan describes them as "insanely expensive." This is accurate.

Here is what I am doing about this: I am no longer submitting articles to expensive journals and no longer writing books for publishers who charge high prices. My journal papers are now submitted only to "open access" journals that do not charge writers or readers anything. Mine are available for free download at sdkrashen.com. I am not the only one doing this. It is happening in other fields, and in our field you can also find Jeff McQuillan's articles on the internet at backseatlinguist.com, Beniko Mason's articles at benikomason.net, and you can find many others at researchgate.

And now our progress. For those of you who want to see all the details, again, it is available to you free of charge at the websites I just mentioned.

Studies over the last few years show that methods of language teaching that are consistent with what we are calling "optimal input" result in more language acquisition and so far promise to be more pleasant for students and teachers.

Notice that we are talking about INPUT. The "optimal input" hypothesis says, once again, that we acquire language and develop literacy from input, from understanding what we hear and read, NOT from speaking or writing. Our ability to speak and write fluently and accurately is the RESULT of acquiring language from input. The evidence for this includes studies showing the universality of a silent period in informal language acquisition situations, studies showing that more output (speaking and writing) does not result in more language development, the observation that language acquisition can occur without any output at all, that increasing input increases the quality of output, and the observation that forcing output in language classes before acquirers are ready is a cause of considerable anxiety.

I first discussed optimal input years ago, and the concept has been deepened and improved on by Beniko Mason. Optimal input has these four characteristics:

(1) It is comprehensible. This does not mean that every detail is comprehensible: Input can be quite comprehensible even if there is some "noise" in the input, some incomprehensible bits. This includes unknown vocabulary and grammar rules that have not yet been acquired but are not important for comprehension. In other words, language acquisition does not require that you understand every word and every part of every word, but language acquirers should understand most of it.

(2) Optimal input is very interesting, or "compelling." Compelling input is so interesting you temporarily forget that it is in another language. If input is

comprehensible and compelling, acquirers will often not notice the noise in the input.

(3) **Quality:** Optimal input is rich in language that contributes to the message and flow of the story or text. The language included in the input also gives the reader support in understanding and therefore acquiring new aspects of language.
It is not necessary to make sure that certain grammar and vocabulary are used: Rich input automatically includes new, unacquired language that acquirers are ready for (i+1).

(4) **Quantity:** It takes a great deal of comprehensible compelling rich input to achieve competence. Optimal input is therefore abundant, which will provide more opportunities for acquisition of new language.

The result of getting optimal input is subconscious language acquisition: Language acquirers will be focused on the story and on the message, and they will not always be aware that acquisition has happened. The knowledge will be represented subconsciously in their minds.

We are currently examining these exciting hypotheses about optimal input:

<u>Stories and self-selected reading:</u> The best forms of optimal input we have found so far are (1) listening to stories, stories that are made comprehensible in a variety of ways, including drawings, occasional translation, and explanations. This kind of Story Listening, developed by Beniko Mason, is a powerful and pleasant way to lead students to another form of optimal input: (2) self-selected reading.
Prof. Mason recommends providing large amounts of easy written input: In her English classes in Japan, she provides students with access to hundreds of books in easy English (sometimes called "graded readers") that give students the competence to read and understand authentic reading, and the teacher helps students find books that are right for them. Mason calls this "guided self-selected reading (GSSR). GSSR leads students to eventually read "authentic" books.

We have ignored the importance of GSSR, and have underestimated how much of it is necessary. While we blame people for not acquiring other languages, we make no effort to make it possible, offering only the same ineffective and dull grammar classes.

<u>Immersion.</u> Popular ways of acquiring second languages only work if they contain a great deal of optimal input. A good example is "immersion," living in the country where the language is spoken. Immersion may contain a great deal of optimal input (deep friendships that include highly interesting conversations and interesting reading), or it may contain mostly non-optimal input (eg many short superficial conversations).

When acquirers obtain optimal input, <u>individual differences</u> in rate of acquisition are diminished and may disappear. In other words, given the right conditions we are all "gifted" language acquirers.

I conclude with a case history that is consistent with our current hypotheses. This came about when a new faculty member at USC contacted me (we had met before briefly), and we performed the pleasant ritual of having coffee. Prof Nooshan Ashtari is from Iran and her father, in fact, was born in Isfahan.

As academics do, we told each other what our current research was about (normal people talk about their families, and these days, Donald Trump). When it was my turn, I basically told her what I just told you. She immediately thought of the case of Mahmoud Hessabi, a world-famous physicist from Iran who passed away in 1992, at the age of 90. Prof. Ashtari immediately saw the relevance of Prof. Hessabi's experience to our work.

Prof. Hessabi was an accomplished polyglot, born in Iran but lived in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, France and the US at various times in his life, and these immersion experiences contributed to his knowledge of Farsi, Arabic, English and French. But he was also competent in German, despite not having a German immersion experience. On a trip to Germany, he wanted to speak to a store employee about an item in the store, but could not. He decided right then to acquire German. He was 60 years old at the time. He made it a regular practice to "study German" for 30 minutes every evening for the next 30 years.

 "Study" included a great deal of reading. He began by reading "short and simple books used for teaching German to language learners" and after a few years was reading "complex philosophical German books." He eventually wrote letters in German to a colleague who was a native speaker of German and who supplied him with books: She wrote to him: "If someone didn't know you personally, they would think that your mother tongue is German."

Note that Prof. Hessabi's approach included a version of the Guided Self-Selected Reading (GSSR) developed by Beniko Mason, which I just described. The short and simple books he read provided the linguistic competence that made reading authentic books possible.

It must be pointed out that this report is not the only case history showing impressive progress in a second language through reading. What is clear is that the path from **"simple and short" reading to authentic pleasure** reading deserves more attention in the language teaching profession.

It has been a great pleasure "being here" with you today, if only virtually.