



A CRITICAL REVISIT TO KRASHEN'S INPUT HYPOTHESIS AND CHOMSKY'S INNATE HYPOTHESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Since the 1960s, several models and theories have been developed to dissect the field of SLA, aiming for a deeper understanding; however, it remains challenging to explore its multidimensional nature thoroughly. Numerous studies have been conducted to expand the boundaries of second language acquisition (SLA). Consequently, new areas within SLA have been identified, and new findings reported, prompting further inquiries that require adequate addressing. Research is ongoing, exploring fresh ideas and drawing conclusions daily, thus continually enriching the subject. However, second language acquisition remains a field of study shrouded in tantalising mystery, with more questions than answers persisting (Troike, 2005; Ellis, 2020). Many significant issues await thorough exploration. The defining term 'Second Language Acquisition' requires special attention for proper examination. It raises several questions. First of all, what is a 'Second Language'? Secondly, what is the implication of the word 'acquisition'? Thirdly, is 'acquisition' synonymous with 'learning'? Fourthly, if they are not equivalent, how do they differ from each other? It also prompts further inquiries about whether 'Second Language Acquisition' is merely a process of acquiring a second language or a distinct field for studying that process. In this paper, the researcher has concentrated on conducting a conceptual study of Second Language Acquisition, focusing primarily on the definition of SLA and the distinctions between 'acquisition' and 'learning', if any, with special reference to Stephen Krashen's input hypotheses (1982) and Chomsky's innate hypothesis (1957).

Keywords: *Second Language, Acquisition, Learning, Classroom Teaching, Monitor Theory*

Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a branch of Applied Linguistics, an interdisciplinary field that investigates real-life linguistic problems to offer practical solutions. It is also a scientific discipline that endeavours to study the process of acquiring a second language systematically and scientifically (Gass & Selinker, 2008). SLA as a research field developed in the 1960s. Since then, several theories have emerged, including Skinner's Behaviourist theories, Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Monitor Hypothesis, Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis, Richard Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, Chomsky's Innate Hypothesis, and Nativist Theory, all aimed at dissecting the body of SLA for better comprehension. Countless studies have been conducted to expand the boundaries of SLA. Consequently, new areas have been identified, and new findings have been reported, raising further queries that need to be adequately addressed. In the process, several influencing factors have been identified, including age, attitude, aptitude, cognitive skills, metacognitive awareness, sense of grammar and vocabulary, intelligence, learning styles, and personality traits, which predominantly affect second language acquisition and aid in comprehension, making SLA easier to understand. However, defining its complex nature remains a challenge (Ellis, 2015; MacWhiney, 2015). In this context, Muriel Saville-Troike (2005) observed that "the multidisciplinary approach to studying Second Language Acquisition (SLA) phenomena which has developed within the last half century has yielded important insights, but many tantalising mysteries remain" (p. 2). Thus, as a research field, SLA has emerged as an area to be studied with renewed fervour. It is still in its infancy, with more questions than answers (Ellis, 2020). The defining term 'Second Language Acquisition' demands special focus for adequate exploration. It raises several questions. First of all, what is a 'Second Language'? Secondly, what is the implication of the word 'acquisition'? Thirdly, is 'acquisition' synonymous with 'learning'? Fourthly, if they are not equivalent, how do they differ from each other? Furthermore, it poses questions about whether 'Second Language Acquisition' is merely the process of acquiring a second language or a distinct discipline aimed at studying this process. However, in this paper, the researcher has concentrated on making a conceptual study of Second Language Acquisition, focusing chiefly on defining SLA and the distinctions, if any, between the concepts of 'acquisition' and 'learning', with special reference to Stephen Krashen's input hypotheses (1982) and Chomsky's innate hypothesis (1957).

Given its intricate and multifaceted nature, the field of ‘Second Language Acquisition’ has been interpreted and defined by numerous linguists from various theoretical perspectives. This diversity of understanding highlights the complexity of the processes involved in acquiring a second language and underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of the various factors influencing this phenomenon. Some linguistics experts have observed that SLA is the process of acquiring a language learned after the native language, thus making it an object of study (Troike, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Ellis, 2015). Other experts opine that SLA is not merely a process of acquisition; rather, it is a scholarly field of study, a discipline dedicated to investigating the process of acquiring a second language (Ellis, 1986; Troike, 2005; Ortega, 2013). Hence, considering these views, SLA can be described both as the process of acquiring an L2 and as a distinct discipline for studying this process. Understanding second language acquisition is challenging and often illogical, making it difficult to grasp a second language. A second language, also referred to as L2 or target language, is the language learned after the first language is acquired during childhood (Ellis, 2015). Here, ‘second’ does not imply that it is the only language learned after the first; instead, it encompasses all additional languages acquired after the first language is learned. This additional language may be second, third, fourth, or fifth, broadly referred to as a second language (Troike, 2005). Many researchers prefer the term ‘additional language’ over ‘second language.’ However, a second language refers to a language or a series of languages learned after the first. It could be a language from the learner’s own country or a foreign language, but it must be widely used and significant in the socio-cultural context. It is employed as an official language, holds social dominance, and is necessary for higher education, better employment, and other basic needs (Troike, 2005). In defining second language acquisition, Rod Ellis (2015) also points out that the second language is a language used “as a means of wider communication” (p. 6). For instance, the English language in Singapore can be regarded as a second language, and the learning of English can be classified as second language acquisition. When learning a second language, learners receive sufficient natural exposure to the target language, facilitating a smoother and more effective acquisition process.

The question may arise: does ‘second language’ differ from ‘foreign language’? The answer to this question is positive. Unlike a second language, a foreign language is not the language of the native country but rather that of other countries. It is neither recognized as an official language of the learner nor as a language with broader use in the immediate socio-cultural context (Miao, 2015). Therefore, learners cannot access natural exposure to practice their target language. For example, English in Japan can be considered a foreign language. A foreign language is typically learned through formal instruction, usually taking place in a classroom, with limited opportunities for daily use (Ellis, 2015). FLA is also taught as part of the syllabus in schools or colleges, allowing learners to read written books and materials in foreign languages and seek employment abroad. Typically, learners study a foreign language to secure jobs overseas.

A conscious reader must notice that while defining SLA and FLA, Ellis has made no distinction between ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning.’ The terms have been used synonymously and interchangeably, essentially meaning the same thing: learning. Although he has differentiated between ‘foreign language acquisition’ and ‘second language acquisition’ based on their contexts, he does not use the terms ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ differently, even knowing that ‘foreign language acquisition’ involves formal instruction and ‘second language acquisition’ involves natural exposure to the target language (Ellis, 2015). It is essential to clarify the distinction between acquisition and learning at this critical juncture.

While the context of the discussion is the distinction between the terminology ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’, Stephen Krashen is one of the most influential figures to be mentioned for his Monitor theory. In his Monitor model, Krashen (1981) opines that the terms ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ are not similar at all. He asserts that ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ involve different processes and are thus completely different from each other. The monitor model, alternatively known as the Input Hypotheses, is a combined version of five hypotheses: the input hypothesis, the acquisition – learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. First of all, the ‘input hypothesis’ primarily focuses on language input and its contribution to the process of language acquisition. According to Krashen (1981), language input is a crucial and influential factor that plays a pivotal role in the acquisition process. Furthermore, he observes that the process of language acquisition primarily depends on the comprehensible language input of the surroundings. The more the learner can access language inputs, the more they can enhance their linguistic competence. Here, language inputs imply both the spoken and written forms of language. Krashen (1981) suggests that to develop one’s linguistic competence, it is essential to comprehend language input, both spoken and written. He also argues that the advancement of linguistic competence depends solely on language input; on the other hand, he downplays the importance of language output, meaning the act of uttering or speaking. Secondly, in the next part of the hypotheses, the most relevant hypothesis for the present study, the ‘acquisition-learning hypothesis’, Krashen makes a clear distinction between the terminologies ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ based on their relation to consciousness. According to Krashen (1981), acquisition is a natural, intuitive, and informal process that is entirely subconscious. He states that it is not a conscious process but one that learners need not be aware of (Krashen, 1981; Troike, 2005). Here, learners can easily pick up language with minimal conscious effort. In this context, “rules” and “grammar” are internalized naturally and spontaneously (Krashen, 1981; Ellis, 2015). Learning, on the other hand, is a formal and conscious process that relies entirely on conscious effort. It involves a deliberate attempt to acquire language, akin to what occurs in formal schooling. In this process, “rules” and “grammar” are taught formally, with special attention given to correcting errors made by the learners (Troike, 2005; Ellis, 2015). According to Krashen (1982), learning is “knowing about language” (p. 10), and acquisition is a kind of adaptation to a language without having any knowledge of its rules, structure, or grammatical formation. He further argues that acquisition does not depend on learning; acquisition can occur without any formal teaching, meaning that while learning can be guided and modified by it, learning is not a prerequisite (Krashen, 1982). Krashen further develops this argument in the subsequent

hypothesis entitled 'The Monitor Hypothesis'. Here, Krashen denies any strong significance to learning. He argues that the process of acquisition itself is sufficient for acquiring and developing linguistic competence. Learning plays a vital role in the advancement of linguistic competence, rather than acting as a monitor that edits and modifies the language produced by the learner during the acquisition process. It is the acquired system of the learner that enables them to speak spontaneously and fluently. Additionally, a learned system, acting as a monitor, detects errors in the forms and vocabulary of the output language and corrects them accordingly (Krashen, 1982). This is why learners take time to speak, as they must arrange the rules of language correctly (Krashen, 1981). In the next hypothesis, termed the 'natural order hypothesis,' Krashen explains the very nature of acquisition. He argues that the process of acquisition follows a uniform order common to all learners, akin to universal grammar, and is unaffected by external factors. In the final hypothesis, the 'affective filter hypothesis,' he identifies the factors that can influence the process of language acquisition. He observes that negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, or embarrassment, can adversely affect the process of language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). In this way, Krashen differentiates 'acquisition' from 'learning' while also explaining their nature, influencing factors, and importance in the development of language competence. In doing so, he places greater importance on 'acquisition' compared to 'learning'. The influencing and determining factors of language acquisition identified by Krashen include age, attitude, emotion, gender, personality traits, learning styles, and others that predominantly affect Second Language Acquisition.

The very definition of language acquisition, as proposed by Krashen, clarifies that acquisition is a natural process children use to acquire their first language. It requires a natural setting for communication. Acquisition focuses on the meaning conveyed by the language, not its form. Checking and correcting errors, as well as addressing any concerns about rules, are not crucial for acquisition (Brown and Hanlon, 1970; Brown, Cazden, and Bellugi, 1973). The acquisition process can be smooth and healthy if the language is simple and easily comprehensible (Snow and Ferguson, 1977). It has also been hypothesized that the order of acquisition of structures in language acquisition is relatively stable (Brown, 1973; Dulay and Burt, 1975). Acquisition does not involve any intentional efforts to study and learn the rules of language. An acquirer may have an intuitive 'feel' for grammaticality to self-correct, at least to sense some fault in the form of language, with which a learner can speak correctly even without knowing its proper rules. On the other hand, learning is considered to be form, structure, and rule-oriented. It is always conscious of error correction and the presentation of explicit rules (Seliger, 1975; Krashen, 1982). Almost like an invigilator, the learned system constantly monitors the grammatical errors made by learners and helps them speak and write correctly, maintaining the grammatical pattern properly. This is something that has been assumed, but the extent to which such feedback has a significant effect remains an open question (Fanselow, 1977; Long, 1977).

Like a macro theory, Krashen's Monitor Theory has attempted to encompass the most significant factors influencing second language acquisition, including age, personality traits, classroom instruction, innate mechanisms of language acquisition, environmental influences, and input. Undoubtedly, it is a brilliant theory, but not without limitations. (Krashen, 1982). Despite its long-lasting popularity, the Monitor Theory was challenged and criticized by theorists and researchers chiefly based on its definitional adequacy. Gregg (1984) negates the most fundamental hypothesis of Krashen, which distinguishes between acquisition and learning. Gregg argues that under everyday situations, the Monitor cannot be used, and since it is the only way of utilising learning, what is the need to talk about two distinct ways of gaining linguistic competence in a second language? Acknowledging Krashen's constructive attempt to develop an extensive and detailed theory of second language acquisition, McLaughlin (1987) pointed out some inadequacies in his definition of acquisition and learning. According to him, the terms are not defined clearly, thus making it difficult to prove empirically (Birnbaum & Robertson, 1978; Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, it has been argued that the role assigned to unconscious learning has been overestimated and exaggerated (Christina, 1998). Another complex issue regarding the acquisition-learning hypothesis is determining whether the learned knowledge is acquired or learned. Despite several criticisms, Krashen's Monitor Theory of second language acquisition has had a lasting impact on subsequent research in the same field.

"Can there be learning without attention?" (p. 12) Schmidt (1994) challenges the fundamental issues of the Monitor hypotheses with this question. He denies that learning is possible without intentional and conscious effort on the part of the learner. After conducting a close study of the problem, he observes that a certain amount of learning may be possible without consciously noticing the rules and forms of language. It is the learner's noticing or conscious attention that makes teaching smoother and more effective. (Schmidt, 1994). Schmidt (2001) believes that noticing plays a significant role in the learning process. The more a learner notices, the more they learn. Swain (1995) in his Output Hypothesis and Long (1996) in his revised Interaction Hypothesis argue in support of the idea of Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis. Both considered conscious attention as the key mechanism that links input to acquisition. (Ellis, 2015). Though they support the importance of mindful learning, none of them deny Krashen's hypothesis of unconscious learning. It is considered that learning occurs more effectively when both processes of 'learning' and 'acquisition' work together. (Swain, 1995; Long, 1996) Thus, the concept of 'acquisition' is recognized as a distinct process, different from 'learning'. 'Acquisition' is not equivalent to 'learning'.

While discussing the process of learning, Ellis in 1994 identified two types of learning: 'Implicit learning' and 'Explicit learning'. He defines implicit learning as a kind of acquisition of knowledge that "takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operation" (Ellis, 1994, p. 1). This definition further supports the idea that knowledge is acquired naturally and without conscious awareness. On the other hand, explicit learning is defined as a "more conscious operation an individual makes and tests hypotheses in search of structure" (p. 1). This type of learning aligns with Krashen's concept of learning. Furthermore, the distinction between explicit and implicit learning reflects Krashen's hypothesis that differentiates between 'acquisition' and

'learning'. The foregoing explanation clarifies that a learner acquires the knowledge of a second language both explicitly and implicitly, meaning consciously and unconsciously.

Apart from monitoring hypotheses, several theories and models exist that argue for and support the natural, subconscious process of language acquisition. Among them, Skinner's Behaviourist theory, Chomsky's Nativist theory, and Innate hypotheses are worth mentioning. While explaining the Nativist theory in the 1950s, Noam Chomsky proposed the concept of a natural system known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to Chomsky (1957), LAD is an innate, natural device that enables children to learn a native language effortlessly without any external assistance. While discussing the intrinsic knowledge of rules and grammar, Chomsky proposed the Universal Grammar theory, which posits that there is an inherent, genetically determined language faculty that governs the rules, making it easier and faster for children to learn and speak. On the other hand, Behaviourism studies the behaviours of animals and humans under specific conditions, including stimulus, response, and reinforcement. In the behaviourist view (Skinner, 1957; Watson, 1924), language learning is seen as the formation of habits. According to Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden (2013), behaviourism "stems from work in psychology which saw the learning of any kind of behaviour as being based on the notions of stimulus and response. Human beings are exposed to numerous stimuli" (p. 29). From this perspective, Second Language Acquisition is also a natural and habitual process greatly influenced by social interaction in informal settings.

The foregoing explanation reveals that knowledge of a second language results from a combination of natural and formal, intuitive and intentional, implicit and explicit processes, collectively known as the dual mode system. The learned system of knowledge monitors what has been acquired. In this context, Skehan (1998) observed that "two systems co-exist, the rule-based analytic, on the one hand, and the formulaic, exemplar-based on the other" (p. 54). Mere awareness of the dual system can make a classroom a more effective platform for language acquisition. Although school is a formal setting where instruction-based teaching is practised, it can also provide an informal environment, deliberately offering the necessary inputs to beginners and low-intermediate students (Krashen, 1981). In this regard, the classroom can be superior to the outside environment, where easy and comprehensible input is not willingly provided. In school, teachers and peers can also be guided and instructed to use language that is easier to understand, facilitating language acquisition. It has already been revealed that learning makes a learner grammatically correct, but it cannot help the learner to be fluent in speaking. Acquisition enhances language fluency. Several studies have been conducted on this very subject, revealing that despite having a good understanding of the rules and grammatical concepts of a language, learners often fail to speak fluently.

Conclusion

Keeping all views and ideas in mind, it can ultimately be concluded that although the terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' are often regarded as synonymous and used interchangeably by several linguists, they are distinct. Acquisition is a natural, intuitive, informal, incidental, and subconscious process, much like first language acquisition, of which individuals need not be aware. Acquisition focuses on the meaning conveyed by language rather than its form (Krashen, 1981). Checking and correcting errors, as well as addressing any concerns about rules, are not crucial to acquisition. Here, learners can 'pick up' language with little or no conscious effort (Troike, 2005; Krashen, 1982). Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process that involves intentional effort to acquire language, much like what occurs in formal schooling. In this context, "rules" and "grammar" are taught formally, correcting the errors made by learners (Ellis, 2015, p. 7). In Krashen's exact words, learning is "knowing about language" (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). Learning does not "turn into" acquisition, while language acquired through acquisition can be modified and guided by learning. Furthermore, it can be stated that acquisition can occur without formal learning in informal environments (Krashen, 1982). Based on the precise definition of the terminology, it can be noted that the term "Second Language Acquisition" is technically incorrect, as this disciplinary field is devoted to studying both acquisition and learning simultaneously. However, despite the distinction between the two terms, 'L2 acquisition/learning' is often used interchangeably in SLA as a cover term for both natural acquisition and conscious learning (Ellis, 2015).

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