

A Review of Krashen's Input Theory

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Abstract. Stephen Krashen is a famous American language educator. Krashen's achievement in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) has won him a worldwide reputation and influence. In the 1980s, Krashen first proposed five series of hypotheses, namely, the Acquisition-Learning Distinction, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which later are collectively called the "Input Theory". For many years, this theory has been recognized as the most comprehensive and significant theory in the area of SLA, but while gaining great recognition, this theory has been accompanied by a lot of controversies since its appearance, causing a lot of research and discussion in the academic circle. By analyzing and collating domestic and foreign literature, this paper studies the five aspects of Krashen's Input Theory in detail, expounds their respective definitions and academic evaluation, and then points out the controversy they are facing with and the suggestions for improvement. Through the author's research, the Input Theory has altered the idea of language instruction and offered fresh suggestions for communicative language teaching. However, this theory is supposed to be applied with consideration for the unique characteristics of each user and should be defined more explicitly in order to achieve the finest outcomes and bring more developments to the field of SLA.

Keywords: Krashen; Input Theory; second language acquisition; language teaching.

1. Introduction

Stephen D. Krashen is a famous American language educator, whose lifelong commitment to second language acquisition has earned him worldwide fame. Since the late 1970s, Krashen had started to advance a number of hypotheses on second language acquisition (SLA). In 1982, he published a book systematically describing his five hypotheses on SLA and later they were summarized as "Input Theory" [1]. This theory is regarded to be the most thorough and significant theory in the investigation of SLA, while it also arouses a lot of controversy.

Second language acquisition is one of the most important research objects in the field of applied linguistics, and its theories are of great significance to language teaching and practice. The main research object of this paper is Krashen's Input Theory. By studying and sorting out this theory, readers can realize the prominent points of this theory and its existing disputes and defects at the same time, so as to help readers better understand the process of language learning and propose better methods to second language teaching for the improvement of it.

2. Hypothesis 1: The Acquisition-Learning Distinction

2.1. Definition and Evaluation

Among all the hypotheses of the Input Theory, the most fundamental and well-known one is the Acquisition-Learning Distinction. This hypothesis is built around the distinctions between "acquisition" and "learning" and how each plays a part in the development of second language ability.

From Krashen and some other second language acquisition specialists' viewpoints, there exist two separate paths that students might take to advance their second language proficiency [2]. Children learn their mother tongue through a subconscious process called "acquisition" that arises from natural communication of attention to meaning. The brain's left hemisphere houses the acquired language system, which serves as the foundation for the spontaneous usage of language. On the contrary is the process of "learning", which can be regarded as a conscious process. That is, attaining language

comprehension and mastery of its grammatical concepts through classroom teachers' instruction, complemented by deliberate practice, memory practice, and other exercises. Although not always in the language area, the learnt language system is in the left hemisphere of the brain. According to Krashen, "acquisition"—the process by which language is produced—is the only factor that can directly encourage the growth of second language proficiency [3]. As a result of "learning", the deliberate comprehension of language structure cannot be viewed as a component of language skill itself; rather, it can only serve as a monitoring function in language use.

After making a great deal of academic studies, linguists can now define the key aspects of the distinction between "acquisition" and "learning" systems. The differences in the principle of markedness and computational complexity represent two diagnostic dimensions that are expected to distinguish the two systems [4].

2.2. Controversy

Despite Krashen's attempts to separate the concepts of "acquisition" and "learning", the line between the two remains unclear. There may be a grey area where conscious knowledge acquisition meets subconscious knowledge acquisition. What Krashen argued that language learning cannot be language acquisition is difficult to test because the definition of conscious acquisition and subconscious acquisition is not clear enough, so it is difficult to distinguish the results of learning from those of acquisition.

What's more, in the real world, learning has always been regarded as more important than acquisition in most classrooms. To take China as an epitome, the first thing teachers say in the classroom can always be "focus". They ask students to analyze and record new structural projects in the classroom. Afterwards, students will practice giving correct answers in terms of structure or function, but always be aware of what they want to say. In these classrooms, students will be tested and categorized by the grammar and vocabulary knowledge they have mastered. Therefore, students can gradually be forced to "learn" just for exams.

To a large extent, it is grammar knowledge or rules of usage that teachers teach the most in the classroom, while facilitating the acquisition of languages can always be neglected in traditional classes. Therefore, educators are supposed to take some actions (like making changes to the types of classroom activities) to help students better acquire a language.

3. Hypothesis 2: The Natural Order Hypothesis

3.1. Definition and Evaluation

According to the Natural Order Hypothesis, language structure is something that individuals acquire in a specific order. Based on morpheme research, this theory holds that learners acquire grammatical structures in a predictable, "natural order" that is unaffected by the learners' age, first language (L1) background, or environmental factors. To give some examples of this hypothesis, the plural noun comes before the possessive for people learning English as a second language, and the continuous tense comes before the past tense. According to Krashen, the Natural Order Hypothesis does not mandate that a syllabus be created in this particular sequence [1]. In reality, there is a reason not to teach in any grammatical sequence if teachers' aim is to assist pupils in developing a given level of language proficiency.

The Natural Order Hypothesis also clarifies errors and mistakes made by pupils. When the frameworks they employ have not completely mastered, students make errors or developmental mistakes [5]. According to this theory, students can use the knowledge they have mastered at that stage to modify their utterances and correct the mistakes appearing in their output. Therefore, it can be concluded that there will always be mistakes during students' acquisition process, so an ideal endeavor to assist understudies with trying not to commit errors is to give more info which contains the construction being referred to.

3.2. Controversy

The academic circle has also raised some doubts about the Natural Order Hypothesis, which mainly focuses on the lack of explanations for the efficiency of language and pragmatic meaning. It is “predictable” for the acquisition of grammatical structures according to the Natural Order Hypothesis, but this standpoint applies more to the learning of morphemes. Besides, in this hypothesis, Krashen does not provide a rational explanation for the “predictable order”, and ignores the individual changes when learners are acquiring a certain language.

4. Hypothesis 3: The Monitor Hypothesis

4.1. Definition and Evaluation

The Acquisition-Learning Distinction, which captures the intrinsic link between “language learning” and “language acquisition”, is strongly related to the Monitor Hypothesis. This theory suggests that language learning and acquisition have different processes. The true language ability is the language acquisition system, which can be thought of as subconscious language knowledge. In contrast, the language learning system—which is conscious language knowledge—only supervises or modifies the use of the second language. This monitoring activity may take place prior to or following language output, such as speaking and writing. Three requirements must be met for it to be effective: sufficient time, attention to the language form, knowing the rules. Krashen contends that language learners’ use of “monitor” varies depending on the individual. He categorizes learners who constantly utilize the “monitor” as over-users, those who have not learned to use their conscious knowledge or who prefer not to do so as under-users, and those who use the “monitor” in the best possible way as optimal users.

At the same level of acquisition, optimal users frequently possess greater competence than under-users because they can integrate what they have learned with what they have already gained. They can frequently employ the “L1 + monitor” paradigm, which Krashen refers to, when they use logically modified native language syntax through the monitor. The speaker will receive additional input thanks to the established communication procedure in this form of manufacturing [5].

Grammatical ability is generally thought to be vital and essential in language production of L2 learners, especially in spoken forms, and grammatical ability also has a great connection with the Monitor Hypothesis. A student’s monitoring performance’s differences depend on how they use the knowledge they have acquired. It is very important that the learners’ grammatical ability has its unique function in the process of language producing. It is not only the production of language, but also the monitoring of language production. In this respect, paying attention to formal teaching will have a deep impact on students’ grammatical ability in communicative competence [6].

4.2. Controversy

The Monitor Hypothesis itself is also controversial. First, this hypothesis limits the role of learning to monitoring or revision and does not provide relevant explanations. However, continuous learning can offer students an opportunity to practice the target language repeatedly, which may improve their language ability. Therefore, it is inappropriate to neglect other functions of learning.

Secondly, the application of the Monitor Hypothesis has some limitations. Because Krashen only relates this hypothesis to conscious learning, so it obviously does not have enough pragmatic significance.

5. Hypothesis 4: The Input Hypothesis

5.1. Definition and Evaluation

In the Input Hypothesis, acquisition only happens when a student is exposed to “comprehensible input” or second-language input that is just a little bit above his current level of language proficiency

and is able to concentrate on understanding meaning or information rather than understanding form. The renowned “i + 1” formula of Krashen is as follows. From Krashen’s perspective, if the learner can grasp the input and the quantity is sufficient, he can immediately offer the input of “i + 1” without having to think about it. The Input Hypothesis says that learners acquire language by understanding information. To say more specifically, comprehensible input is an essential environmental factor. Besides, an internal language acquisition apparatus can be beneficial for learners to acquire a language, too [7].

Krashen claims that there exists a period of time from input to output in which learners cannot make any original statements, and he refers to this period as the “silent period”. It is interesting that students seem to need such a period to appropriately digest information. At the point when this stage is broken, a negative attitude may appear in students’ hearts when they are learning a new language.

Krashen considers that the skills of speaking and writing (productive skills) come from the skills of listening and reading (receptive skills), hence these productive skills are supposed to receive more attention and emphasis.

5.2. Controversy

Krashen’s Input Theory has come under a lot of fire. Like his hypothesis about the contrast between acquisition and learning, many scholars disagree with the idea that understandable input alone is what causes language ability to improve. Additionally, critics cite formal grammar instruction, language use, the learner's own output, the monitor itself, and of course, language practice as factors in language growth [8].

Krashen’s thesis is regarded as “one of the most controversial theoretical perspectives in SLA in the last quarter of the twentieth century”, despite the praise he has gotten [9]. Krashen denies the important role of output, and besides, there are three major arguments about the Input Hypothesis: (1) Comprehensible input. (2) The next level (i+1). (3) The acquisition processes. Similarly, no precise definition of “comprehensible input” is provided by Krashen just like the term “i+1”. There are various definitions of the word “comprehensible”, like the definition of “able to be understood” or “intelligible”. In many explanations, the terms “comprehensible” and “comprehended” are used in opposition to each other, as the former refers to a potential or a process, whilst the latter refers to reality or the outcome of an action.

The Input Hypothesis also has the flaw of exaggerating the significance of language input while omitting to explain how input is integrated into learners’ intrinsic knowledge [10]. The input is what the brain first concentrates on when processing language. The degree of attention will be affected by both internal and external elements, including discourse settings and tasks, the correctness of learners’ information, and the differentiation of learners’ skill. As a result, it cannot be said that receiving a lot of language input would automatically result in learners developing internal language knowledge.

6. Hypothesis 5: The Affective Filter Hypothesis

6.1. Definition and Evaluation

According to this theory, learning a second language is influenced by a variety of emotional elements as well as the environment, which suggests that pupils may not be able to learn the target language well even when exposed to a lot of understandable data. Linguistic “intake” requires the emotional filtering of linguistic input before it can be considered language. Krashen believes that motivation is one of the affective elements influencing language acquisition. The learning effect is directly impacted by whether or not the students' learning purpose is obvious. Students who have a specific goal in mind can advance more quickly; otherwise, there is minimal impact. Secondly, character. Students that are outgoing, self-assured, and open to learning in a new environment grow academically more quickly. The last one, state of mind. Mostly, this is talking about anxiety and relaxation. People with greater emotional reactivity or anxiety receive less input.

Depending on learner's mood, the affective filter "opens" or "closes" [5]. In other words, if learners are relaxed and in a pleasant learning environment, more input will reach the language acquisition device (LAD), whereas learners' efforts to provide input will be unsuccessful if they are tense or in a terrible circumstance. This is why it's crucial to create a conducive learning environment in the classroom, removing any worry, and motivating pupils so they feel like they can actually learn the language.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis has always been widely concerned in pedagogics. Teachers should get familiar with the tenets of the affective filter hypothesis and use the suggested instructional strategies that result from it in the classroom. In western classrooms, it has been shown that emotional elements affect how students learn [11]. It is well worth a teacher's time to prepare instructional strategies and a variety of teaching resources that can work together to foster and sustain a positive attitude among pupils and a productive learning environment.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis has great practical significance to second language acquisition. By analyzing the intrinsic relationship between students' affective factors and second language learning, teachers can design effective teaching strategies to develop students' active learning affective factors [12]. It has been discovered that successful second language acquisition shares some traits. They can cope with language anxiety and adjust to varied language learning scenarios. They also have a high desire or motivation for the language. By analyzing and using the Affective Filter Hypothesis, L2 teachers can learn more effective methods for running their classes and teaching languages.

6.2. Controversy

Compared with other four hypotheses, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is much less controversial. There does exist a consensus in the academic circle that anxiety, learning motivation and self-confidence will affect second language acquisition to some extent. However, it is worth considering that Krashen's direct application of this hypothesis to every learner is unrealistic, because individual differences must exist and can never be neglected. Therefore, the application of the Affective Filter Hypothesis is mainly queried and challenged by individual differences.

7. Conclusion

Although the five hypotheses of Krashen's Input Theory each has its own controversy, English teachers are still supposed to understand how tightly linked anxiety, learning motivation, and self-confidence are to picking up a second language. Teachers must not only concentrate on teaching the target language but also help pupils feel less anxious and stimulate their learning motivation, so as to enhance students' confidence. Teachers' attention to students' emotional and psychological state can play a positive role in second language teaching.

It should be emphasized that the individual differences in the process of second language teaching deserve more attention. In the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen ignores the individual differences of learners. Therefore, teachers must be aware of individual differences in second language learning in order to modify the lesson plan and student development. The teaching methods and abilities of teachers should be as varied as feasible. This means that the training of teachers' teaching skills is very important, and a variety of teaching methods and strategies must be mastered.

In addition, it is vital to integrate critical thinking in the field of second language teaching. Because of their notoriety or illustrious careers, some experts and scholars should not be passively accepted by teachers or pupils. Teaching quality can be raised by having the guts to dispute and refute pertinent theories. Students will progressively form the habit of thinking critically rather than depending on pre-made theories as a result.

Krashen's Input Theory on SLA has altered the way many linguists think about language instruction and offered fresh perspectives on communicative language instruction. To get the greatest outcomes, the implementation of this theory should be modified to account for the individual

variations of the user. This theory will take on more shape over the coming years, and when combined with other teaching theories and methodologies, it will enhance the methods and outcomes of language education.

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