Unit 2
Second Language Acquisition

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1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis.

The most comprehensible of existing theories of second language acquisition[1] is Krashen's Monitor Model (Krasken 1982). It consists of the following five hypothesis:

This hypothesis lies at the heart of Krashen's theory. It is concerned with the process of internalizing L_2 knowledge, storing this knowledge, and using it in real communication.

The hypothesis distinguishes between acquisition and learning. Acquisition takes place at the subconscious level and occurs as a result of participating in natural and meaningful communication. Learning takes place at the conscious level and occurs as a result of conscious study of the formal properties of the language[2].

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[1] (See Supplementary No. 1).

[2] We learn by consciously applying the rules of language, by reading or listening to explanations of these rules and by having our errors corrected. Acquired knowledge acts as the major source for performance and production of utternances.

2. The Natural Order Hypothesis.

This hypothesis states that acquisition occurs in a predictable order. The hypothesis affirms that some grammatical features are acquired at an early stage and others tend to be acquired late[1].

The errors which acquirers make on their way to acquire correct grammatical forms are also predictable in both first and second language acquisition.

3. The Monitor Hypothesis.

The Monitor hypothesis shows the interrelationship between acquisition and learning. Learners use the acquired competence when they make utterances and refer to the conscious rules of learning to correct the output of their performance. Thus, conscious learning acts as a Monitor or editor. This can occur either before or after the utterance is made. (See Figure 2.1 below). In either case the use of the Monitor is optional.

Learned competence
(The Monitor)

Acquired competence

Out put
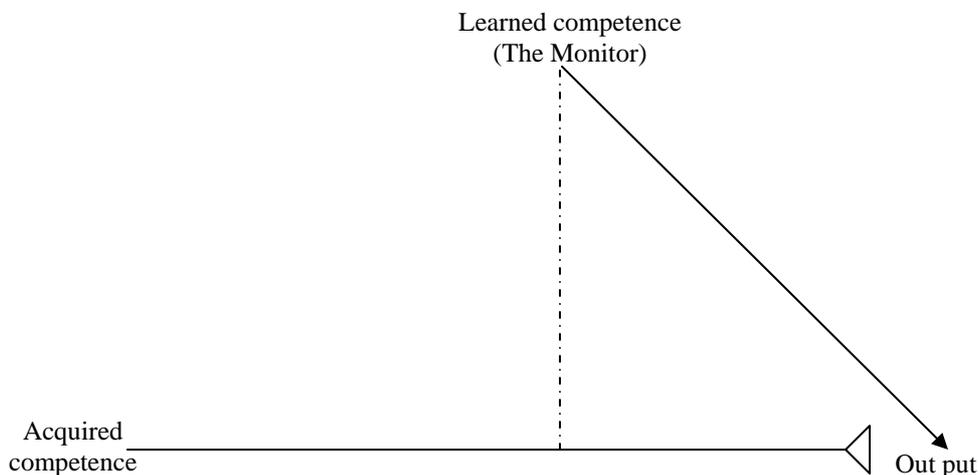
Figure 2.1: A model of adult Second Language performance

(Krashen and Terrel 1983, P. 30).

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[1] For example in English the progressive marker-ing is among the first grammatical morphemes to be acquired, while the third person singular-s is among the last.

Krashen gives three conditions for the use of the Monitor:

* There must be sufficient time;

* The focus must be on form and not on meaning; and

* The user must know the rule[1].

Monitor use is absent in most conditions involving communication. Fluency in second language performance is due to what we have acquired rather than to what we have learnt.

4. The Input Hypothesis.

This hypothesis attempts to explain the way we acquire language. It states that in order to acquire language, the acquirer must understand (by learning or reading) the input language that contains structures "a bit beyond" his or her current level of competence.

In terms of the Natural Order, if an acquirer is at stage or level i, the input he or she understands should contain $i + 1$. By "understand" Krashen means understanding the meaning and not the form of the language (emphasis is placed on the message)[2].

5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis.

This hypothesis deals with how affective factors relate to second language acquisition. The filter controls the quantity of input the learner receives. The filter is affective because its strength or weakness depends on the learner's motivation, self-confidence, or anxiety.

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[1] It is rare to find these conditions realized in the real world (they are met on grammar tests).

[2] According to this hypothesis, there is no need to teach speaking; it will emerge after the acquirer reaches a sufficient competence via input.

It is assumed that learners with high motivation and self-confidence and with how anxiety have low filters and so obtain and let in plenty of input. On the other hand, learners with low motivation, little self-confidence, and high anxiety have high filters and so receive little input and allow even less in.

In short, Krashen's theory of second language acquisition states that acquisition is more important than learning. Krashen considers the "comprehensible input" and the 'low affective filter' the two major conditions necessary for language acquisition[1].

Do you think that classroom language provides the necessary condition for L_2 acquisition? Does the level of students have an impact on L_2 acquisition?

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[1] Classroom teaching which provides these two conditions helps L_2 acquisition. It is believed that this sort of teaching is of immense help for beginners who cannot utilize the informal environment for comprehensible input, but of less value for advanced learners who can take advantage of it.

Supplementary No. 1: Theories of Language Acquisition

1. The Mentalist View of First Language Acquisition.

The Universal Grammar of the language consists of a set of discovery procedures (acquisition device, AD) which relate the universal principles to the data provided by exposure to the natural language.

Chomsky (1966) presents this mentalist view in the form of a model:

Primary linguistic data $\rightarrow$ AD $\rightarrow$ G.

For the language acquisition device (AD) to work, the learner needs access to primary linguistic data (input) which acts as a trigger for activating the device. It is the acquisition device rather than the linguistic data which shapes the process of language acquisition. Thus, the acquisition device is responsible for producing the grammar (G) of a language.

Lenneberg (1967) places much enphasis on the biological properties of the child as factors in language acquisition. The child's brain, Lenneberg argues, is especially adapted to language acquisition. As maturation takes place this propensity is lost.

Research has indicated a fixed sequence of development through which children pass on their way of learning the L_1 language by an incremental process.

1. The incremental nature of L_1 acquisition can be seen in two ways: first, the child moves from one-word utterances to two-word, three-word, or four-word utterances, and so on.

2. Second, The child builds his knowledge of the grammatical system in steps: inflections such as (ing) of present continuous tense or the auxiliary verb "do" are not acquired at the same time, but in sequence.

   Thus, one sense of the term "process" describes the stages of development which the child follows.

The second sense of the term "process" explains how the child constructs internal rules and how he adjusts them from one stage to another.

The mentalist view claims that language acquisition processes are internal and work independently of environmental factors.

However, it should be made clear that though the learner-internal factors are powerful determinants of language acquisition, they are not capable of explaining the entire process. Language acquisition seems to be the result of "a dynamic interplay' between external and internal factors through the actual verbal interaction between the learner and his interlocutor as the interactionalist view of second language acquisition has indicated.

The mentalist view of first language acquisition has influenced theories of second language acquisition. This influence can be clearly seen in the interlanguage theory.

The term "interlanguage" was first used be Selinker (1972) to refer to the interim grammars constructed by second language learners at any given stage in their development in learning the target language. This sort of language is different from both the L_1 and the L_2 system.

The interlanguage theory of L_2 acquisition is derived from the mentalist view of L_1 acquisition research. It holds that all human beings possess a faculty responsible for language acquisition. And the acquisition follows a universal order of development. That is, different L_2 learners follow a similar developmental route.

2. The Universal Hypothesis.

The Universal Hypothesis is based on the generative grammar approach which assumes that the human mind has innate linguistic knowledge or Universal Grammar which is biologically determined and specialized for language learning. Chomsky (1980) puts it as follows:

Universal grammar is taken to be the set of properties, conditions, or whatever, that constitute the 'initial' state of the language learner, hence the basis on which knowledge of language develops (p. 69).

Chomsky believes that these innate properties of the Universal Grammar are essential for language learning. It should be remembered that the data available from the input do not provide the child with sufficient clues to discover the rules of language and test his hypothesis. Such input data do not reflect the surface properties of the language as rules of grammar are highly abstract.
So there must be some innate principles which determine the way the child constructs grammatical structures. Such innate principles will constitute some constraints on the kind of grammar which the child can develop. They delimit the number of options which the child needs to explore in the target language in order to discover the rules of the language.

In addition, linguistic universals explain the fact that target language forms which are common to all languages are easier to acquire than those found in few languages.

The Universal Hypothesis attempts to explain how SLA is determined by purely innate linguistic factors. The difficulty with this explanation, however, is that it rules out pragmatic knowledge and describes language in an idealized way far removed from actual use of the language. Indeed Chomsky's innateness is far from real. Thus, Cook (1985, quoted in Ellis, 1985, 210-211) comments:

> Competence is separated from performance, grammatical competence from pragmatic competence, acquisition from development, core from peripheral grammar, each abstracting something from language use.

Linguistic universals, therefore, should not be treated as innates as they are incapable of accounting for communication (Halliday, 1978). Linguistic

universals, according to Halliday, are a manifestation of the types of language use and language development is the product of learning how to communicate in face-to-face interaction.