

On the Scope, Claims and Implications of Krashen's Theory

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Throughout the previous decades many theories have been suggested and applied for second language education. Their implementations have caused many debates among educators and linguists. They have come up with so many theories and approaches based on their perspectives of how languages are best learned. Among these theories are the one offered by Stephen Krashen, the renowned American linguist. This article sheds light on the main claims of the five hypotheses offered by Krashen; it presents some evaluations of whether these hypotheses offer any successful insights that can be incorporated into language teaching of different sittings and ends by concluding that Krashen's hypotheses provide a comprehensive vision about understanding L2 learning and, therefore, exploiting their elements would be fruitful.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN CLAIMS OF KRASHEN'S THEORY

In the early eighties, Krashen (1982, p.9) published his theory which consists of five hypotheses about second language acquisition. These hypotheses are 'the monitor hypotheses', 'the acquisition-learning distinction', 'the natural order hypotheses', 'the input hypothesis' and 'the affective filter hypotheses'. Such hypotheses have received a great debate among educators. His main claims within these hypotheses can be summarised in the following.

According to Wilson (2000, p. 9), monitor hypothesis based on the perception that "the language that one has subconsciously acquired initiates our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency, whereas the language that we have consciously learned acts as an editor in situations where the learner has enough time to edit, is focused on form, and knows the rule, such as on a grammar test in a language classroom or when carefully writing a composition. This conscious editor is called the Monitor." This hypothesis indicates that if learners overuse their monitoring ability, they will encounter difficulty in speaking fluently; however, if they balance it, they will be able to gain accuracy as well as fluency (Caratiquit et al., 2022).

The acquisition-learning distinction is the best known of Stephen Krashen's all hypotheses. According to Husna (2009, p.39), this hypothesis states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language. The first way is language acquisition, language that we pick up subconsciously when we engaged in communication, understanding messages, and learning; the language we consciously study and learn about (Scrivenor, 2005, p.113).

To put it another way, language acquisition is a process similar to the way children develop ability in their first language. Language acquisition as a subconscious process develops naturally in the context of social communication, and language learning is the second way to develop competence in L2. Learning refers to conscious knowledge of a second language and being aware of language rules (Krashen, 1982, p. 10).

Krashen, as stated by Scrivenor (2005, p.114), suggests that “acquisition is the significant process and the language we learn is only of any use in monitoring and checking our communication.”

According to (Husna, 2009, p. 37), ‘the acquisition-learning hypothesis claims that adults acquire language just as children do. This hypothesis claims that the ability to ‘pick-up’ languages does not disappear at puberty; however, this does not mean that adults will always be able to achieve native-like levels in a second language, as most children can do.’

Hence, in order to acquire language, one needs to be exposed to “comprehensible input” which is associated with one of the Krashen’s hypotheses; input hypothesis. This comprehensible input can be gained, in Scrivenor’s (2005, p.114) words, by exposing to ‘real messages communicated to us that are comprehensible but just a little above our current level.’

In fact, this hypothesis (i.e. “input hypothesis”) has also been foundational in theorising about the teaching of L2. ‘Input’ refers to language which is comprehensible by the learner (Venditti, 2021). Husna (2009, p.38) puts it thus:

The input hypothesis claims that in order to move from stage (i.e., what is already and easily understood) to $i + 1$ (i.e., language which is a little beyond the current level of competence), the acquirer needs to hear and understand input that contains $i + 1$. For the acquirer to understand is to use his/ her linguistic competence, the context, knowledge of the world and extra linguistic information to understand language directed to him/her. The situations where acquisition occurs are when the input is comprehensible.

In the light of that, learners should not be given complicated instructions or input which do not fit the hypothesis $i+1$. Scrivenor (2005, p.114) emphasises the need in the classroom for ‘exposure that is restricted or graded in order for it to be an appropriate level.’ In other words, it should not be simple, but just above the level of the learner.

If not, their “effective filter” may become higher. Krashen claims that, when students are relaxed, their feelings are positive and unthreatened, the comprehensible input would be beneficial and valuable. ‘If they are not, their effective filter will be raised and blocks the input from being absorbed and processed’ (Harmer, 2001, p. 74).

The natural order hypothesis states that, “the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order (Wilson, 2000, p.8).” This means that, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired before other, for example, in English present continuous is acquired before the past tense. That is why a number of textbooks tend to cover the continuous before the past tense.

KRASHEN’S CLAIMS UNDER CRITICISM

Krashen’s hypotheses have been subject to a vast criticism. Harmer (2001, p. 72) concludes that ‘Krashen’s claims came under sustained attack because they were unverifiable. When one produce language, how can one tell if this language is ‘learnt’ or ‘acquired’? The speaker will almost certainly be unable to provide you with the answer, and there are no ways, so far, of finding this out.’ Moreover, Harmer adds another point related to this critique; the perception that learnt language can never pass to the acquired store which have been analysed by many educators (e.g. Ellis, 1982; cited in Harmer, 2001) and have stated that ‘both roughly-tuned [related to acquisition] and finely-tuned input (...related to learning) end up becoming acquired language at some point’ (Harmer, 2001, p. 72).

Not only Harmer gave such conclusions, many scholars have also made similar criticism. For example,

critics argue that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the claims made by Krashen's Monitor Model. They argue that the model is based on theoretical assumptions rather than concrete evidence (Hassan, 2022). Others believe that Krashen's hypotheses have overemphasis on input; it is believed that the model lays too much focus on comprehensible input as the primary component in second language acquisition. It is a common believe that learning a language is also greatly influenced by other elements, such as motivation and individual characteristics and differences (Hassan, 2022). To some, the hypotheses fail to account a number of linguistic and cognitive aspects that are involved in language learning (Bailey & Fahad, 2021).

Nevertheless, Krashen's approach remains a well-known language learning approach till the day (Rohani, 2014). For instance, there has not been any rejection of the perception which talks about the beneficial qualities of comprehensible input in a relaxed setting.

EVALUATION AND APPLICATIONS

Despite the criticism, Krashen's theories have been applied comprehensively in second language teaching methodology. A number of L2 methods and approaches build on the perspectives offered by Krashen's theory. To give an example, one may refer to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which echoes the perspective presented by the acquisition-learning distinction. CLT believes that languages are acquired through communication and that the focus of the classroom should be based on encouraging students to speak and communicate via the target language (Cui, 2022). The activities used should stimulate real life communication. In other words, in order for students to acquire L2, the focus should be on meaningful communication rather than the form of the language (Jung, 2019).

Exploiting Krashen's theory, many methods aspire that in order for students to acquire a second language, teachers must focus on communication rather than on the rote memorisation of rules.

Widdowson (1990, p.164) criticised the application of natural communicative use when he states:

Let me summarise the points I have made against a too-ready acceptance of the primacy of doing. To try to replicate the conditions of natural communicative use for language in the classroom is mistaken for two basic reasons. First, to do so is to deny the whole purpose of pedagogy, which is to contrive economical and more effective means of language learning than is provided by natural exposure and experience. Second, natural language use typically deflects attention from language itself and presupposes a knowledge of the language system as a basic resource which learners have, by definition, not yet acquired.

Humanistic approach is another example which builds on the perception of affective filter and its impact upon teaching and learning. Humanistic education takes into account students' emotional states in order to establish and provide a suitable and supportive environment for successful teaching and learning (Aritonang, 2021).

Part from this, according to Krashen, language acquisition is primarily a subconscious process, and takes place in the same sort of way that children develop the ability to speak in their first language. This entails providing meaningful and authentic materials which focus on communication in order to stimulate real situations. Language learning, on the other hand, is a more conscious process of learning word meanings and grammatical rules. Giving students opportunities to develop their syntactic competence along with communicative competence is highly recommended.

This lead us to the fact that, while adults are more able to learn the rules of a new language than children, they are still able to 'pick up' new languages through subconscious processes. However, acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge more slowly than listening skills. Krashen's theories imply that

maximum immersion in communication rich environments is the key to effective language learning (Husna, 2009). In order to help second language learners, most language teachers use ‘modified input’, sometimes called ‘foreigner-talk’, ‘teacher talk’ or ‘inter-language talk’. Modifications made in ‘foreigner-talk’ and ‘teacher-talk’ are usually used for the purpose of communication and to help L2 learners understand what is being said (Krashen, 1982, p. 25).

According to Husna (2009, p.41), the input hypothesis predicts that these modified language codes will be useful for L2 learners. ‘The hypothesis also predicts that natural, communicative, roughly tuned and comprehensible input have some real advantages over finely tuned input that directly attempts to teach the structure of the day’, not every utterance contains the target structure. For example, if the lesson’s focus is the progressive tense marker, other tenses will be used as well in both classroom input and in the readings.’

Based on the application of the discussed theories, many teachers tend to modify their language by coming down to the students’ level in order to ease communication. This perception specifically appears to be implementing Krashen’s (1982) input hypothesis, that ‘in order to help L2 acquirers, modified inputs such as ‘foreigner talk’ and “teacher talk” are useful. “Teacher talk” increases students’ motivation and enhances their attitude towards learning English, which in turn encourages students to practise the target language’ (Husna, 2009, p.188).

According to Krashen, both acquisition and learning are required, at least in an adult learning context. In the light of his theory, the views of some educators and language teachers indicate that some, perhaps many, SL teachers are embracing communicative approaches and methodologies that will enhance acquisition. On the other hand, it has been observed (Husna, 2009; Harmer, 2001; Scrivener, 2005; etc) that many teachers have started to move their teaching forward from a focus on formal instruction that is about learning to more informal and communicative activities that will enhance acquisition.

Within L2 settings, a number of students reported feeling more relaxed and less anxious with bilingual teachers. In this way, it seems that bilingual classrooms may be able to lower the ‘affective filter of anxiety’ (in Krashen’s terms), ‘a pre-condition for language acquisition, according to his theory’ (Husna, 2009, p. 192). However, as pointed out by Husna (2009, p.190), ‘there is no strong evidence that the lowering of the affective filter is related to having access to a shared language and necessary translation, or participating in a shared culture and religion.’ Regardless of this perception, many language teachers believe that sharing the same cultures and backgrounds support learners and help lowering their effective filter.

Besides, he points out that language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules as real language acquisition develops slowly and speaking skills emerge later than listening skills. This leads to important fact about acquisition; the fact that there is a ‘silent period’ in which the child or adult L1 learner builds up competence in the L2 by listening. The learner may say little during several months of exposure to L2 in a natural, informal, linguistic environment. Silent periods allow learners to learn chunks of language/expressions and phrases before they start talking (Krashen, 1982, pp.6-7).

However, there is a crucial point here which should be highlighted. Adults and children in formal language classes are not allowed a silent period. The time specified for learning L2 does not allow having silent period. In fact, they are often asked for language output in the target language, sometimes even before they have acquired enough linguistic competence to express their ideas.

According to Newmark (1966, cited in Husna, 2009, p.38), ‘performers who are asked to produce before they are “ready” will fall back on L1 rules. They will use L1 syntactic rules while speaking the L2 and, needless to say, we as language teachers do not wish to reach that since it causes a problem in successful learning process.’

As a solution for this, Krashen suggests ‘supplying comprehensible input in low anxiety situations containing messages of real language.’ This should not force early production in L2; ‘improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production’ (Krashen, 1982, p. 7). That is why ‘Comprehensible input’ suggested by Krashen implies graded or simplified L2 input with some translation and instruction in L1.

In summary, having said the above, however, these hypotheses should not be presented as theories that we may all accept uncritically as we already know that there are dilemmas, tensions, doubts and different perceptions in an education process when dealing with learners. To put it another way, teachers should not take these perceptions of language teaching as they are. They need to analyse their current pedagogical situations and based on them they search for the most appropriate implementations to be utilised for their students.

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