

SLA Theories



SLA Theories

The Behaviorist Perspective

- Behaviorism had a powerful influence on second and foreign language teaching, especially in North America, from the 1940s to the 1970s.
- The influence of behaviorism was felt directly in the development of widely used **audiolingual teaching materials**.

SLA Theories

The Behaviorist Perspective

- Emphasizes mimicry
- Memorization is important
- Students memorize dialogues and sentence patterns
- Language development is viewed as the formation of habits
- Habits of L1 interfere with L2 acquisition
- New habits are necessary for L2 acquisition
- Errors should be directly corrected to help students develop correct habits

SLA Theories

- **The Innatist Perspective**

Chomsky argued that innate knowledge of the Universal Grammar permits all children to acquire the language of their environment during critical period of their development.

Chomsky primarily focused on first language acquisition and did not say anything about SLA.



SLA Theories

The Innatist Perspective

- Robert Bley Vroman and Jacquelyn Schachter have suggested that although innatist perspective may be an appropriate framework for understanding L1 acquisition, it does not offer a good explanation of SLA.

SLA Theories

The Innatist Perspective

- Vivian Cook and others point out that there is still the logical problem of SLA. That is, we need an explanation for the fact that *learners eventually know more about the language than they could reasonably have learned if they had to depend entirely on the input they are exposed to*. The implication is that knowledge of UG must be available to second language learners as well as to first language learners.

Stephen Krashen

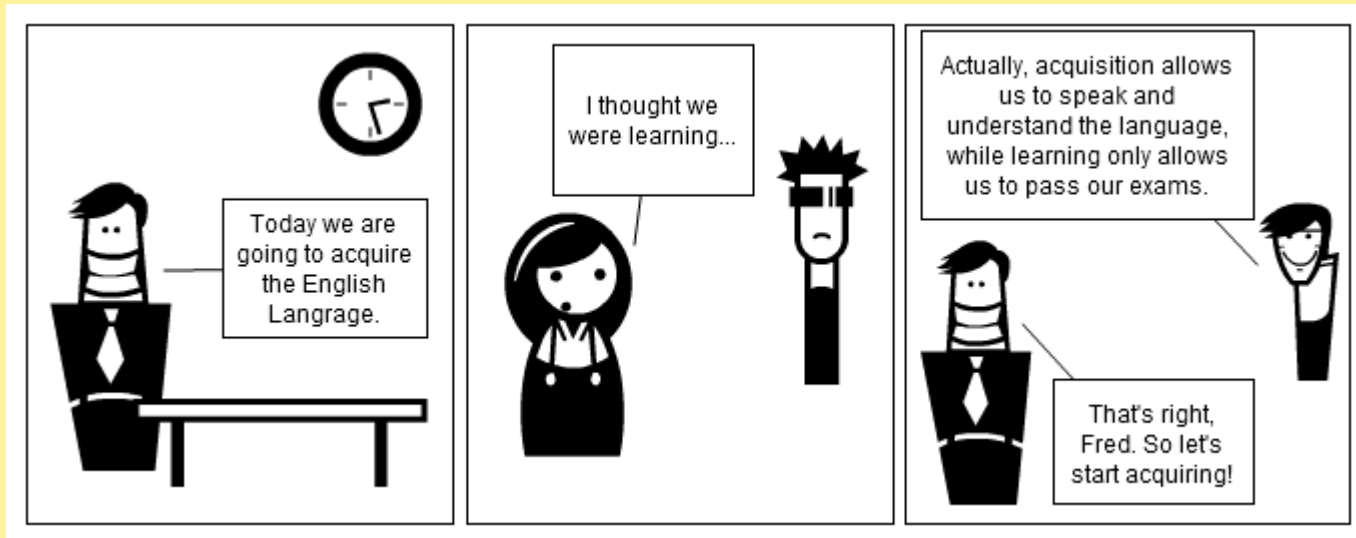
An innatist theory of second language acquisition which has had a very great influence on second language teaching practice is the one proposed by Krashen. Five hypothesis constitute what Krashen originally called the 'monitor model'.

1. The acquisition-learning hypothesis.
2. The monitor hypothesis
3. The natural order hypothesis
4. The input hypothesis
5. The affective filter hypothesis

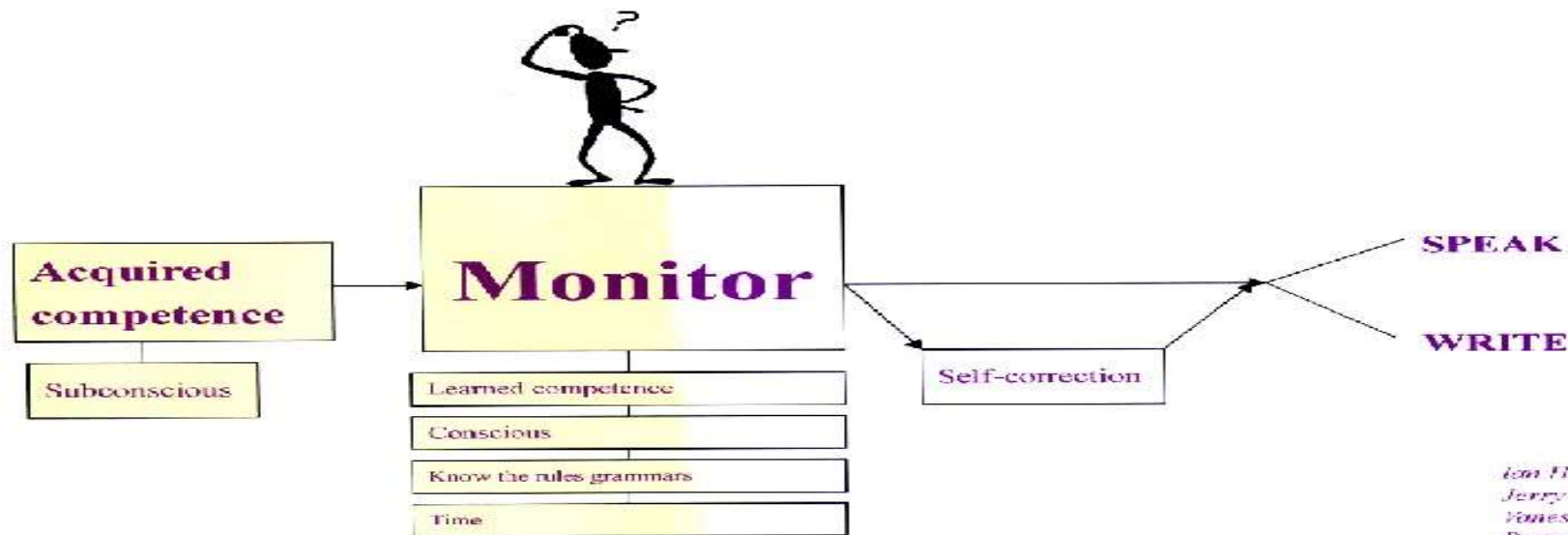


1. The acquisition-learning hypothesis

- Acquisition is an unconscious process while learning is a conscious one.
- We acquire as we are exposed to samples of the second language. This is similar to how children pick up their L1.
- For Krashen, ***acquisition is by far the more important process.*** He states that only acquired language is readily available for natural, fluent communication. ***Further he states that learning cannot turn into acquisition.***



The Monitor Hypothesis



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2. The Monitor Hypothesis

- Krashen argues that the acquired system is responsible for fluency.
- The learned system, on the other hand, acts only as an editor or 'monitor' making minor changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced.
- Learners use the monitor only when they are focused on being 'correct' than on what they have to say, when they sufficient time, and when they actually know the rules.

3. The natural order hypothesis

- Krashen argues that rules that are easiest to state (and thus to learn) are not necessarily the first to be acquired.

Ex: The rule of adding an –s to third person singular verbs in the present tense is easy to state, but even some advanced learners fail to use it in rapid conversation.

- Krashen argues that, like first language learners, second language learners seems to acquire the features of the TL in predictable sequences.

4. The Input Hypothesis

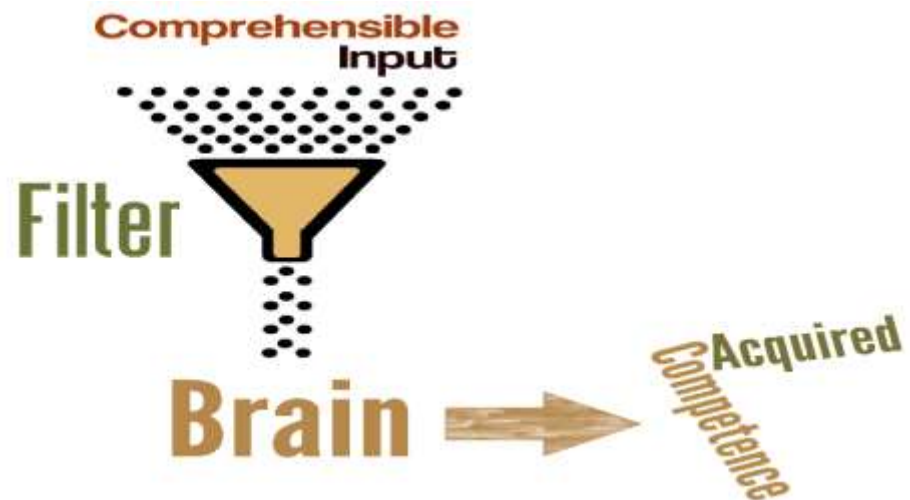
Krashen asserts that one acquires language in only one way-by exposure to *comprehensible input*. If the input contains forms and structures just beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language, then both comprehension and acquisition will occur.

Comprehensible input = $I+1$



5. The affective filter hypothesis

The affective filter is an imaginary barrier which prevents learners from acquiring language from the available input. 'Affect' refers to such things as motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. A learner who is tense, angry, anxious, or bored may 'filter out' input, making it unavailable for acquisition.



Why do you think some of the guest workers who went to Germany from Turkey couldn't acquire German as a second language?



- Do you think that every adult learner who stays in England or USA for 2 years is going to acquire English?



John Schumann and his Acculturation Model

In SLA, the Acculturation Model is a theory proposed by John Schumann to describe the acquisition process of a second language (L2) by members of *ethnic minorities* that typically include immigrants, migrant workers, or the children of such groups.

This very acquisition process takes place in natural contexts of majority language setting.

The main suggestion of the theory is that the acquisition of a second language is directly linked to the ***acculturation process***, and learners' success is determined by the extent to which they can orient themselves to the target language culture.

Acculturation is adapting to a new culture.



- **Acculturation is the way people adapt to a new culture.** Schumann's theory on acculturation is mainly based on the **social and psychological factors** experienced by those learning English as their second language within the target culture. The factors determine the **social and psychological distance** between the second language learner and the target culture in which they are living in. This distance between the learner and the target culture in turn determines the rate of language acquisition.



- Schumann looked at 6 Spanish-speaking subjects living in a target language country and acquiring English.
- One of the six was the Costa Rican Alberto.
- Schumann observed the progress of these learners over a period of ten months, particularly focusing on the acquisition of one structure-making sentences negative in English.
- By the end of ten months, all except Alberto learned how to use negation properly. Over ten months he did not show any progress and he finished as he started.
- Ex: I no can see
They no have water
- Alberto's English was **fossilized** and **similar to a pidgin**.

- Schumann's acculturation model proposes that a learner's **degree of social and psychological distance** will influence his second language acquisition progress.

- **SOCIAL DISTANCE**

These factors dealing with the learner's relationship to the culture of the target FL speakers.

1. Social and economic dominance is either L1 or the FL language culture regarded as socially or economically dominant over the other.

2. Degree of Enclosure where the learner is living. In some countries, guest workers are put together in special compounds with their own living quarters. In other situations, the learner may be living among the 'local inhabitants'.

3. Cultural Congruence How close the FL and L1 societies are. Do they share a religion? A history?

4. Length of residence How long is the learner staying in the FL country?

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE**

1. Language shock : Language shock is suddenly finding that you don't have the right word, that you can't express yourself, and you appear silly.

2. Culture Shock: involves the realization that you are not in control of your environment, and have to expend much energy on the mere process of living.



- **Michael Long and The Interaction Hypothesis**

Long's interactional hypothesis suggests that students acquire an L2 with greater ease and at a quicker rate if they are able to constantly ***interact with peers*** who speak the target language ***with greater proficiency***. These peers may be fellow ELLs, teachers or native speakers.

It posits that interaction between a non-native speaker (NNS) and a native speaker (NS), or non-native speaker of a higher level, creates a naturalistic Second Language Acquisition environment where the NNS learns through ***negotiation of meaning***.

- **Negotiation of meaning** involves saying things again, perhaps using other words and simpler structures, using lots of gestures, and using simple language.
- Long argues that **modification to input** made by NSs in conversation with NNSs play an important role in making input comprehensible to learners.
- Negotiation of meaning includes language checks, which may be in the form of **clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks. (page 114)**
- **Comprehension Checks:**

Ex 1 : NNS: I was born in Nagasaki. Do you know Nagasaki?

Ex 2: NNS1: And your family have some ingress.

NNS2: Yes ah, OK OK.

NNS1: More or less OK?

Confirmation Check:

Ex 1: NNS1: when can you go to visit me?

NNS2: Visit?

Clarification Request:

Ex1 : NNS1: research

NNS2: Research, I don't know the meaning.

Merrill Swain and Output Hypothesis

- Developed by Merrill Swain, the comprehensible output (CO) hypothesis states that learning takes place when a learner encounters **a gap** in his or her linguistic knowledge of the second language (L2).
- **By noticing this gap**, the learner becomes aware of it and may be able to modify his output so that he learns something new about the language.
- Swain claims that **comprehensible output facilitates language acquisition**. Comprehensible output also promotes **fluency** and **automaticity**. This hypothesis is closely related to the Noticing hypothesis.
- Swain defines three functions of output:
 1. **Noticing function:** Learners encounter gaps between what they want to say and what they are able to say, and so they notice what they do not know or only know partially in this language.
 2. **Hypothesis-testing function:** When a learner says something, there is always an at least tacit hypothesis underlying his or her utterance, e.g. about grammar. By uttering something, the learner tests this hypothesis and receives feedback from an interlocutor. This feedback enables reprocessing of the hypothesis if necessary.
 3. **Metalinguistic function:** Learners reflect on the language they learn, and thereby the output enables them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge.

- If you hear only the words «**dog, bit, girl**» regardless of the order in which those words occur what would you understand?
- Input is not sufficient for acquisition, because when one hears language, one can often interpret the meaning, without the use of syntax.
- This is not the case with language output, because one is forced to put the words into some order. Production then «may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing».

SLA theories

The Cognitive Perspective

From the cognitive psychology perspective, first and second language acquisition are seen as drawing on the same processes of perception, memory, categorization, and generalization.

SLA theories

The Cognitive Perspective

- As in L1 acquisition, cognitive and developmental psychologists argue that there is no need to hypothesize that humans have a LAD in the brain. In their view, general theories of learning can account for language acquisition.

SLA theories

Information Processing (IP)

- Proponents of IP model of human learning and performance see SLA as ***the building up of knowledge*** that can eventually be called on ***automatically***.

SLA theories

Steps of Information Processing (IP)

Paying attention is the first step of IP.

Learners pay attention at first to any aspect of the language that they are trying to learn.

But there is a limit to how much information a learner can pay attention to. Thus, at the earlier stages the learner will pay attention to the main words (meaning) rather than grammatical morphemes.

The information processing model suggests that there is a limit to the amount of focused mental activity we can engage in at one time.

SLA theories

- Steps of Information Processing (IP)

Gradually, *through experience and practice*, information that was new becomes easier to process, learners reach this information quickly and *automatically*.

- Reaching automaticity frees up cognitive processing resources to notice other aspects of the language, that, in turn, gradually become automatic.

SLA theories

- Steps of Information Processing (IP)

Researchers suggest that most second language learning starts with **declarative knowledge**.

Through practice, declarative knowledge may become **procedural knowledge**.

- **About declarative and procedural knowledge**
- Declarative knowledge enables a student to describe a rule and perhaps apply it in a drill or a gap-fill. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, enables the student to apply that rule in real language use.
- Not surprisingly, procedural knowledge does not translate automatically into declarative knowledge – try asking a native speaker to explain why exactly she said “I’ve been there” rather than “I went there”. In the same way, declarative knowledge does not automatically cross over into communicative language use. In other words, students may be able to describe a grammar rule and manipulate it through controlled exercises, but consistently fail to apply the rule in communication – spoken or written.

SLA theories

- **Information Processing (IP)**

Transfer-Appropriate Processing (TAP): Cognitive psychologists have observed that when we learn something new, we also internalize some aspects of the circumstances and thinking processes that were present when we learned it.

The TAP hypothesis is that knowledge is easier to retrieve if we are returned to or can recreate those processes and thinking processes.