

Critical Evaluation Of Krashen's Theory Of Second Language Teaching And Learning And Its Representation In The Iranian Context

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Abstract

Different theories of second language acquisition elaborate on how people who already know one language would acquire the second one. One of these theories is Krashen's theory of second language learning. Krashen is an American linguist widely known for his second language acquisition theory. His theory has significantly impacted all areas of second language research and teaching since the emphasis is on input and the students' emotional readiness (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This theory has still been discussed in the field of language teaching since it has well-known effects on language learning and teaching worldwide. Krashen's theory is based on five main hypotheses. They are: The acquisition/learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1988). Each hypothesis has been discussed and disputed widely. However, this study focuses on three main hypotheses of this theory which are the input hypothesis, the acquisition vs. learning hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. Each hypothesis will be presented, discussed and criticized. Then, some empirical studies will be presented for each hypothesis. Finally, the application of these theories in the Iranian context besides my own experiences as learners and teachers will be mentioned.

keywords: Krashen's Theory, Language, Teaching and Learning, Iranian Context

Introduction

The first hypothesis which has been considered in this study is the input hypothesis. The input hypothesis states that input just one level beyond the current level of language learners' proficiency could be acquired. Krashen calls this type of input as comprehensible input

(Krashen ,1987).There are some pieces of evidence to support comprehensible input hypothesis .The first one is the pieces of evidence obtained from the first language acquisition in children. Krashen compares the input hypothesis with caretaker speech. He draws on some similarities between "caretaker speech" and the comprehensible input hypothesis. He mentions these two are similar since both of them are simple and roughly adjusted for children based on their levels of proficiency. Also they both talk about what exists in the immediate environment of the children (Krashen, 1987).

The second pieces of evidences for the input hypothesis come from second language acquisition process. Krashen compares second language learners with children acquiring the first language. He considers a natural order for the second language acquisition and a modified input similar to the first.

And finally ,the third pieces of evidence for this hypothesis are derived from applied linguistics research (Krashen, 1987, p.22).The findings of these studies confirmed that the input hypothesis is in line with the consequences of what can be called "method comparison" experiments (Krashen, 1987, p. 29). Empirical studies found that the natural approach and the applications of Krashen's hypotheses, focusing on learners' readiness and the role of input, are more successful than the audiolingual and grammar-translation approaches.

One of these empirical studies was done by Escamilla and Grassi (2000). They found that strategies such as showing a picture and incorporating gestures would make input comprehensible. Using visuals and words could help learners learn the words more willingly. These findings align with Krashen's input hypothesis, which declares

that the acquisition of vocabulary and spelling through reading is solid evidence to support the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1989).

Another empirical study was done by Brown and Plamer (1992). In this study, they developed the listening approaches: methods and material for applying Krashen's input hypothesis. In this study, there were two teachers. They talk and interact with each other in order to make what they say comprehensible. Learners were supposed to listen and try to understand. They could stay silent till they feel ready. The study found that children benefit more than adults from the input-intensive program.

One more discussion could be related to the role of the input hypothesis in developing the listening skills of EFL learners. Cakir (2018) found that providing comprehensible input would facilitate listening comprehension of Turkish EFL, and course books should be designed to facilitate the implicit way of developing listening skills. Similarly, Sheng (2017) found that Krashen's theory would improve the listening comprehension ability of EFL learners by improving input and enthusiasm.

Although the input hypothesis has been accepted widely, there are specific criticisms regarding the definition of learners' level of proficiency. It is challenging to define and specify learners' level of proficiency. Meanwhile, it is difficult to define a unit as $i+1$ (Ellis, 2012). In a well-known article, Swain (1985, cited in Shehadeh, 2003) debated that comprehensible input may not be adequate for successful second language acquisition, but providing situations in which the acquirer could produce comprehensible output is also necessary. Situations in which learners could produce language allow for a mechanism that helps learners to notice the gap between what they know and what they should obtain through feedback (Adams, 2003). Finally, Mackey (2012) mentions that Krashen ignores the role of interaction and the role it could play in facilitating second language acquisition and students' language use. Since as Long (1996) mentions acquisition of second language acquisition is only possible for learners who engage in meaningful interaction. Meanwhile, Schmidt (1990) believed that Krashen's input hypothesis could be criticized since it completely ignored the role of noticing.

The second hypothesis of Krashen which is going to be discussed in this paper is the acquisition vs. learning hypothesis. This hypothesis claims that these are two different ways of second language learning. Acquisition refers to the natural and unconscious process; however, learning refers to a procedure in which conscious rules about a language are settled. Formal teaching is necessary for "learning" to occur, and correcting errors helps develop learned rules. Krashen has used the terms conscious and subconscious (unconscious) to identify the difference between acquisition and learning (Krashen, 1983). He makes a distinction between the subconscious and conscious types of language learning and concluded that learning processes may differ in the amount of awareness on the part of the learners. Some learning is more or less unconscious, which is referred to as acquisition. On the other hand, learning requires more awareness and consciousness.

Meanwhile, Krashen (1992) believes that the grammatical rules of a language could be acquired through using a language and an unconscious process. Moreover, he does not consider conscious learning helpful. However, he mentions that the classroom is a situation in which activities must be organized to allow learners to use language and acquire it. Also, Brown (2007) approved the role of implicit learning, which is based on "learning without conscious attention or awareness" (p.292).

Nevertheless, there are some criticisms regarding the definition of conscious/subconscious in this theory. The word subconscious is unclear, and critics believe that by "subconscious," Krashen means "unconscious" (Schmidt, 1990). Krashen believes consciously acquired rules cannot be changed into unconscious ones, but Cook (1991) and Spolsky (1984, as cited in Chastain 1988) challenged this concept.

The last hypothesis which will be discussed here is the affective filter hypothesis which highlights the role of emotions in the learning process. Emotions could act as a filter to impede or facilitate the learning process. Three main affective variables are called motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen mentions that learners with high motivation and self-confidence tend to be more successful; meanwhile, low personal anxiety and low classroom anxiety pave the way to second language acquisition (Krashen, 1988)

The affective filter hypothesis states that learners with a low affective filter pursue and take more input, communicate with confidence, and are more interested in the input they obtain. Anxious acquirers have a high affective filter, which stops acquisition from taking place. The increasing level of motivation and self-confidence

and decreasing the level of anxiety provide a stress-free environment. Establishing a stress-free environment is one of the critical elements of a productive teaching environment (Mitchell&Myles, 2014).

There are many studies about the influence of the affective filter hypothesis in language learning. Some of them are discussed. Henter (2014) did a study and concluded that affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and attitude influence learning a foreign language. Elkhayma (2020) elaborated on the role of anxiety and foreign language learning. He found a close relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning in Asian EFL learners. Chen (2022) went through many studies on Krashen's second language acquisition theory and found that the affective filter hypothesis is one of the most prominent. Arnold (2000) mentions that emotion is a significant issue influencing language learning and teaching, and Brown (2002) observes the impact of affective factors on language teaching.

The practical application of Krashen's Theory:

The application of these hypotheses in language teaching could be found in the Natural approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In this approach, the emphasis is on exposure, input, and the students' emotional readiness. A stress-free setting would provide a friendly environment; in addition, other hypotheses, such as the monitor and natural order hypotheses, develop an approach that focuses highly on comprehension.

This approach has been widely used in the field of language teaching. One of the most prominent features of this approach is that there is a silent period in children and language learners. During this period, comprehension is formed in learners before production. When the learners feel ready, they start production. Krashen and Terrell (1983) believe that the Natural approach is suitable for beginners to become intermediate. It supports the naturalistic way of language learning. It focuses highly on communication but less on the explicit teaching of grammar and the correction of errors. This approach focuses on a stress-free environment, and learners are not forced to produce the language. This approach to language teaching is based on some characteristics.

The Natural approach aims to develop communication skills. Learners are considered as children passing through different stages of development. They move from the pre-production stage towards the early-production stage and, finally, the speech-emergent phase. On the other hand, teachers are sources of comprehensible input and are supposed to provide a stress-free environment. Teachers should communicate clearly with learners about the nature of the course and the expectations that should be made at the end of the course. To sum up, teachers play two primary roles (Bailey & Fahad, 2021). First, they should involve learners in selecting the correct type of material for language classes. Teachers can help their learners find authentic or pedagogic materials. Second, teachers should provide the context so learners can comprehend the text completely by introducing parallel sources. Teachers should provide a situation in which learners can make meaning.

In this approach, routine activities such as group work are used in the classroom, but they are supposed to offer input. In these classrooms, the teacher provides comprehensible input and low-anxiety situations to improve self-confidence and minimize learner anxiety. Classes in the natural approach concentrate on grasping ideas in the foreign language and put less importance on drilling and error correction or conscious learning of grammatical rules. Learning a wide range of vocabulary is emphasized over learning new grammatical structures. Meanwhile, teachers following the natural approach want to make classroom situations more intrinsically motivating for students.

To this aim, materials are designed to raise communication and comprehension. Authentic materials are primarily used in the classrooms since they are believed to be a source of comprehensible input. The main goal of materials in the Natural Approach is to use "the extra-linguistic context" to make the language learning as meaningful as possible that helps the language learner to comprehend and consequently to acquire (Krashen & Terrell 1983, p. 55), by linking classroom activities to the real world, and by developing real-life communication.

Considering all these features of the natural approach, many language teachers have enjoyed its application. However, there are some advantages and disadvantages regarding this approach. The advantages deal with the point that the learners could acquire the language in an easy way that is entirely natural; meanwhile, materials are designed so that the learners acquire the language from easy to difficult. Therefore, one more advantage is that it provides a well-established context for beginners and in this context many words could be acquired by the learners since they are used a lot in communication, and the mother tongue is not used in the instruction process. On the other hand, there are some disadvantages. Learners develop fluency but need to be more accurate. Moreover, if

the immediate setting is not speaking English, it can be difficult for the learners to learn English since finding teachers who know about this approach and could fit within this context takes work. Finally it could be concluded that this approach is strong in theory, but it may be weak in practice.

Nonetheless, it cannot be overlooked that this approach brings new insights into the process of language learning and teaching and assumes a new role for teachers. Although this approach has been widely criticized and challenged, but the role of input still plays a crucial role in the field of language teaching. Amiruddin and Jannah (2020) found that English learners at higher education levels could benefit more and have better English proficiency levels. They concluded that the Natural approach is more operational than standard methods and approaches in improving English language proficiency levels at higher education. It suggests that the teachers could help students with natural communication since it offers meaningful input.

Applying these hypotheses in the Iranian context seems necessary. There are two different contexts for language learning in Iran. One is schools, and the other one is language institutes. In schools, the amount of time dedicated to language learning is minimal. More than one session a week (about 90 minutes) is needed to make language learning possible. The ministry of education has specified the materials. They are designed based on reading texts, drills, and grammar exercises. The students need to be more motivated since the book and the activities could be more engaging. However, many language learners learn foreign languages by attending English institutes in Iran.

As an English learner, I started learning English at an English language Institute called ILI (Iran Language Institute). In that institute, the books and the language learning method were Audiolingualism. The atmosphere of the classroom was full of stress. Learners experienced lots of anxiety while practicing dialogues and drills. The learners were forced to practice and produce. There needs to be a place for learners' motivation and self-confidence. Learners' errors were corrected on the spot. There is no silent period.

However, in our county, teachers have recently taken into account the role of affective factors. Previous teaching methods considered teachers as leaders in classes. Therefore, in English classes, teachers taught the knowledge without considering whether the students were ready to accept the knowledge. Krashen and his idea, mainly his focus on the affective filter, changed the atmosphere. When I graduated, I started teaching at language institutes. The situations have changed a lot due to the tendency towards more communicative and humanistic approaches. Learners' feelings were considered an important factor. Teachers were encouraged to pursue self-correction and peer correction in their classes in order to decrease learners' anxiety and stress. Teachers were considered a source of comprehensible input. They were supposed to provide materials that were not easy or difficult for language learners. Teachers were supposed to help learners to become autonomous in the process of language learning. In fact, teachers got far from the traditional, dogmatic role to a modern and more humanistic one.

My own experience as a teacher in Iran reflects the critical role of providing comprehensible input. If the input is too difficult for language learners, they will become demotivated and they will not be engaged in the process of language learning. On the other hand, if the input is too easy, it will not capture the learners' attention and therefore they will not become motivated. There are many empirical studies supporting the role of the input hypothesis in the Iranian context. Tehrani, Barati, and Youhanaee (2012) found that young learners' vocabulary learning and communication skills were enhanced meaningfully in the Natural approach (2012). In another study done by Tabatabaei and Yakhabi (2009), it was found that comprehensible input plays a significant role in developing the complexity and accuracy of L2 learners' speech. The scholars found significant improvements in the accuracy and fluency of Iranian EFL learners' productions. They found that not only comprehensible output but also comprehensible input are important in developing language productions. Therefore, this study suggests an eclectic input and output hypothesis approach for developing language proficiency. Shakibaei and Niazifar (2019) studied and concluded that $i+1$ material could improve reading English motivation.

As a teacher, I also found that anxiety would impede the process of learning. Several learning problems may arise when the learners are anxious or demotivated. The results are in line with the study was done by Dastpak and Sadeghi (2017). They found that there are sources of anxiety that impede the language learning process. Also, Saif, Riazi & Rahimi (2012) concluded that motivation is one of the significant predictors of using language learning strategies which would lead to improvement of language proficiency of language learners. Therefore, teachers should be familiar with the psychological characteristics of learners. Teachers training courses could be presented for the teachers to become familiar with the recent studies done in the field of language teaching about

the role of psychological characteristics namely affective factors involved in the process of learning. Since as Nazemi&Rashidi (2015) asserted that there was a significant relationship between learners' attitudes and their level of autonomy. If the learners become motivated, they will be more autonomous in the language-learning process and improve their language proficiency.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to discuss the characteristics of Krashen's theory. It was found that the theory still plays a significant role in language teaching, although it was developed many years ago. It remains to influence the academic world. Markee (1997) provides some reasons for the success of the approach. The first reason is that, despite its complexity, it was easy to be realized and it was also finely tuned with the understanding about second-language acquisition. Third reason goes back to Krashen's belief towards the role of teachers that they could feel free to practice this approach beside their current classroom practices.

Considering all these hypotheses, the language learning process is not the same as other field of study. It is very different from learning history or geography. It is a highly complex process. As teachers, we can provide stress-free environments and comprehensible input for our learners to help them enjoy the process of learning. Wang Fan (2019) declares that teachers should actively discover and practice different teaching methods and concentrate on students' emotional changes in class. Teachers could implement a selection of methods to improve learners' confidence and motivation, which is supportive of progressing learners' learning ability and teachers' teaching proficiency.

Meanwhile, teachers could improve their teaching by dedicating more time to learner comprehension of the target language. Carefully selected texts could provide comprehensible input for language learners to develop their linguistic knowledge. They were encouraged to use authentic texts. In addition, teachers are responsible for creating motivation on the part of the learners. Giving responsibility to language learners and involving them in the process of decision-making could motivate learners more. Teachers should tap learners' motivation and engage learners in making meaning.

Moreover, the role of extensive reading in this approach has been reemphasized since it could act as a motivating factor to make learners read more. Extensive reading is also a source of comprehensible input (Day & Bamford, 1998). Krashen (2004) calls extensive reading "pleasure reading," which could increase language learners' motivation. Highly motivated learners would find the process of language learning a pleasant one. Krashen (2011) highlights the role of a reading-based program through which learners get mastery of a linguistic system through extensive reading. Through reading, learners could improve their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Meanwhile, Krashen's focus on extensive reading changed the field of language learning. Reading provides more comprehensible input for language learners. Learners would feel more motivated while reading interesting texts and books. This would help learners improve their reading comprehension ability and their vocabulary knowledge. Nation (1992) conducted two experiments with graded readers, one in England and the other in Pakistan. He found out that there are lots of learning advantages to extensive reading and meaning-making. He also mentioned that the benefit of extensive reading could be achieved in the long term.

Although this theory has some advantages, the difference between input and intake and the trivial role of output have yet to be discussed in this theory which adds to its drawbacks. Moreover, the method underestimates the status of consciousness-raising and intentional learning in second language acquisition. The method supports the role of emotions in learning a second language, but it cannot elaborate on the role of individual differences in language learning. Meanwhile, the student's social identity is correspondingly ignored.

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