

Krashen's Language Acquisition Theory and Its Application to E. F. L. in Japan

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Introduction

Stephen Krashen has become a 'household name' to many linguists and language teachers as one of the pioneers of a total approach to second language acquisition. With a set of five hypotheses, he attempts to describe the entire process which a learner goes through in order to acquire a second or foreign language, and uses these hypotheses to create a framework for the manner in which language should be taught. Despite the comprehensive nature of his hypotheses, many linguists claim that they are not well supported with scientific research and the concepts and terms that he uses are not clearly defined. However, his overall concepts make intuitive sense to many teachers of foreign languages in their experiences both as language learners and as instructors.

This paper examines Krashen's five hypotheses, summarizing the main points and the merits of and problems with each one. In addition, each hypothesis is considered for its applicability to EFL teaching methods in Japan in an effort to consider whether the application of Krashen's theory could be seen as a positive move towards a more communicative approach to language instruction, or a negative approach which should be rethought.

I. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

A) Main Points

According to this hypothesis, acquisition is the subconscious development of proficiency in a language through its use in a natural or communicative setting where the focus of the language exchange is on meaning, not on actual structure. Krashen claims that "language acquisition is the central, most important means for gaining linguistic skills even for an adult"¹). Learning, on the other hand, is defined as 'knowing the rules' or having conscious knowledge of grammar, and is only useful as an editor, or Monitor. Thus, "we use acquisition when we initiate sentences, and bring in learning only as a kind of after-thought to make alterations and corrections".

According to the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, 1) acquisition can take place without learning (in natural situations, for example), 2) learning can take place without acquisition, and 3) it would be impossible for a language learner to 'learn' the rules necessary to become proficient in a language, which are difficult to explain but can be easily 'acquired'.

Krashen²) points to other terms used by researchers such as 'implicit' and 'explicit' learning and 'automatic' and 'puzzle-and-problem-solving performance' to demonstrate the general acceptance of the concept of two different processes. However, unlike many other linguists, he insists that the two are separate and virtually unrelated, and that learning can never become acquisition. This, in turn, leads him to the conclusion that, while language teaching can be beneficial for 'learning', it is virtually useless in promoting acquisition.

B) Merits

According to Marton, the Learning-Acquisition Hypothesis is an extremely valuable contribution to the field of linguistics and language instruction because it turns our attention to the manner in which knowledge from a learning situation (i. e. the classroom, etc.) should be applied. "Teaching grammar is often so ineffectual precisely because teachers assume that the transfer of knowledge and skills gained in a grammar class to more or less spontaneous production tasks will occur immediately"³⁾. Any language teacher can cite examples of grammar mistakes that their students have made just after the grammar point has been covered extensively in the classroom, or an example of a student who (though having written or spoken a form correctly in practice moments before) cannot repeat a form in a more natural dialog or spontaneous situation. According to Krashen, this is because they have only 'learned' the structure, not 'acquired' it.

Krashen uses the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis to examine the effectiveness (as well as the limitations) of classroom learning⁴⁾. "The value of second language classes, then, lies not only in grammar instruction, but in the simpler 'teacher-talk', the comprehensible input. It [the classroom] can be an efficient place to achieve at least intermediate levels rapidly, as long as the focus of the classroom is on providing input for acquisition"⁵⁾. Krashen goes on to point out that, while the classroom can be used as an effective tool, it is no replacement for the outside world and it should only be used in order to prepare students to go out to find the much larger variety of input available to them in natural settings.

Therefore, the appeal of this hypothesis to the language teacher could be seen as (1) its focus on meaningful and communicative use of language, (2) its concrete suggestion of using classroom teaching as a means to acquisition through the simple and frequent use of language geared towards the approximate level of the learner, and (3) its explanation of the reasons why language teaching until now has been at times unsuccessful (due to lack of acquisition). It suggests that, should the teacher simply apply Krashen's concept of comprehensible input, the learner will suddenly be able to 'acquire' a language.

C) Demerits

Two major criticisms of Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis are that (1) 'learning' and 'acquisition' are poorly defined and, (2) because of this, the distinction between acquisition and learning cannot be tested⁶⁾.

Many researchers^{7),8),9)} have expressed major objections to Krashen's original 'non-interface position', which suggests that formal instruction would be ineffective for 'acquisition'. These criticisms led to Krashen's redefinition of the position into 'three interface positions': strong, weak, and weaker, which try to explain the influence learning might have on acquisition. These were again criticized for his insistence on the separation of 'learning' and 'acquisition', as many linguists feel the two are separate but directly related^{10),11)}. Rivers points to neurological evidence stating that it would be "impossible except in pathological circumstances to have such an artificial barrier in the human"¹²⁾. Most instructors also feel that learning and acquisition are cyclical and that 'learning' provides security to beginning language learners¹³⁾.

Concerning Krashen's argument that the classroom should only be used to supply comprehensible input, Ellis¹⁴⁾ argues that the studies that Krashen uses to support his argument are of classrooms with formal (traditional) instruction methods. He points out that, although the learners did indeed acquire some forms that were not formally taught, Krashen did not take into

account the effects of instruction. Though Krashen refers to methods of communicative instruction (such as Total Physical Response, The Natural Method, etc.) and claims that they lead to faster acquisition, he does not directly compare them to formal methods. Therefore, according to Ellis, Krashen's results are conjectural.

Finally, Krashen's claims that advanced learners would receive greater input (and thus greater acquisition) in a natural environment have been criticized because findings have shown the benefits of classroom instruction for advanced learners. Ellis¹⁵⁾ refers to these problems and suggests a redefinition of learning, or abandonment of Krashen's hypothesis for a different 'interface position', such as the one proposed by Sharwood-Smith¹⁶⁾. This position states that learning and acquisition, though separate, are distinctly related. Another viable position suggested is the 'variability position'¹⁷⁾, which recognizes a greater variety of learning styles based on 'analyticity' and 'automaticity'.

D) Japan

White states, "The languages taught in Japanese school are taught as subjects for exam taking, not as a way to communicate with others"¹⁸⁾. The Japanese teaching system is still largely focused on teaching English in a manner that encourages deductive reasoning. This is due to the necessity of preparing for entrance exams designed to test a learner's knowledge of grammar and structure. According to Krashen's hypotheses, the attainment of this type of knowledge would be classified as learning. Krashen and Terrell¹⁹⁾ assert that conscious language learning can be helped a great deal by teaching, as it encourages deductive reasoning. Thus, in a sort of backhanded way, Krashen's theories actually support the continuation of the grammar-translation method, at least until the structure of university entrance exams is altered to test a student's acquisition of language rather than knowledge of structure. If the Ministry of Education were to adopt Krashen's theories as a basis for creating a new method of English language education promoting acquisition rather than learning, it would have to radically revise its testing format, as well as the textbooks which are designed to prepare students for the test. In order to encourage acquisition, it would also be necessary to provide an environment in which the learner could subconsciously acquire proficiency through focus on meaning and communicative tasks, rather than having to focus on the structure of the language itself.

Krashen would say that, because Japanese students are subjected to six years of grammar-translation, they have not 'acquired' any English during that time. However, although most students' speaking proficiency levels are low, they are generally able to communicate in basic English. This suggests that even a focus on 'learning' does lead to a certain amount of acquisition. In response to this, Krashen would probably counter that the students had been exposed to some comprehensible input at some point during the learning process, thus leading to the acquisition of basic language functions. This seems questionable, however; the large majority of students hear very little spoken English beyond the first two years of study, as the last four years of secondary school are spent almost entirely on preparation for the entrance exam.

II. The Monitor Hypothesis

A) Main Points

According to Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis, 'learned' language results in the creation of a 'Monitor'²⁰⁾. He states that this Monitor has extremely limited functions in that it can only edit

that which the learner has already 'acquired', thus indicating that formal rules (or conscious learning) play only a limited role in second language performance.

Research by Krashen and Terrell showed that when adults were given tests of a communicative nature, they tended to produce language in a natural order and with error patterns similar to child acquisition. However, when given written grammar tests, they produced errors that Krashen termed 'unnatural' (not corresponding to the child's first language order), therefore suggesting the existence of Monitor²¹). He claims that Monitor users can be divided into three types :

- 1) Monitor Over-users, or language learners who are continually comparing their output with the Monitor for accuracy. The speech of these learners is characterized by frequent hesitation and self-correction, leading to a lack of real fluency. Krashen claims that these learners have become Monitor Over-users due to their exposure to grammar-based learning techniques or personality types which cause them to feel insecure and dependent on the Monitor for constant reassurance.
- 2) Monitor Under-users, or language learners who rarely call on their Monitor to correct their utterances. The speech of these learners is fluid but filled with grammatical errors because they rely solely on their 'acquired' language, or the way words 'feel', and are impervious to corrections by teachers or native speakers.
- 3) Optimal Monitor Users, or language learners who use just the right amount of Monitor to correct their output without major distraction or negative influence on their fluency. Krashen states that producing these learners should be our pedagogical goal as instructors²²). These optimal learners will not use their Monitor in spoken output where it would interfere with fluency, but will call on it in writing or speeches when there is time to focus on rules and correct themselves²³).

B) Merits

The Monitor Hypothesis suggests that fluency is determined by what a learner has 'acquired', and that formal instruction, as it only applies to 'learning', would only serve to influence our editing, or 'Monitoring' of acquired knowledge. This helps to account for differences in fluency despite similar levels of acquisition; Monitor over and under-users would show problems of fluidity or grammar and pattern mistakes, whereas optimal users would be able to use the language which they have acquired with more fluency. It could also explain why learners who have unlimited access to native speech may nevertheless be unable to produce output at native-like levels, due to over or under-use of the Monitor.

The Monitor Hypothesis would be useful in the development of a classroom syllabus. It states that the teaching of semantically and syntactically simple rules could be helpful, while focus on a grammar-based method could actually be harmful to a language learner by encouraging the overuse of the Monitor. Because the Monitor can only edit that which has already been acquired, the Hypothesis suggests that any grammar exercises (to develop efficient Monitor use) be introduced only after a certain amount of acquired knowledge is accumulated²⁴). This suggests that the first few classes be strictly limited to activities designed to encourage 'comprehensible input' and a lowering of the 'affective filter' (to be discussed later). Krashen also stresses that language teachers not focus on error correction in natural conversation activities, as it will encourage overuse of the Monitor, thus making the hypothesis useful for the teacher interested

in creating a classroom with a relaxed atmosphere.

C) Demerits

Gregg²⁵⁾ gives the most complete evaluation of the Monitor Hypothesis, summarizing the criticisms of many linguists into categories: (1) the hypothesis in its current form is unfalsifiable, (2) Krashen does not explain how to create an Optimal Monitor User, (3) the research and following interpretations used to support the hypothesis are questionable, (4) other research which might throw doubt on it are ignored, (5) there is no testing of the hypothesis where falsifiable predictions are made, and (6) Krashen uses repeated references without substantial evidence. Af Trampe²⁶⁾ states that the hypothesis is 'too simplistic, mere labeling' and Ellis²⁷⁾ points out that "Krashen tends to conflate Monitoring and 'Learning', although the former refers to performance and the latter to rule internalization"²⁸⁾. Pica calls for a reinterpretation of Krashen's 'easy' vs. 'hard' distinctions to make room for effects of acquisition as well as for learning. However, this seems to be something that might be difficult for Krashen, as it requires admitting to a more interactive relationship between the two processes.

While critics of Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis do not deny the existence of some type of monitor, most feel that the 'monitor' must be more variable. Examples are given as Carroll's original 'Monitor Theory'²⁹⁾, Yorio's 'super-Monitor'³⁰⁾, and Ellis' 'Extended Monitor Theory'³¹⁾. Since his initial proposal of the 'Monitor', Krashen himself has regulated this hypothesis to a lesser importance³²⁾.

D) Japan

According to Krashen³³⁾, in order to be able to use the Monitor effectively, it is necessary to have (1) time to inspect the utterance before it is spoken, (2) conscious awareness of the correctness, and (3) knowledge of the rule. In Japan, English achievement is generally measured by the use of written tests designed to make the student think about language form rather than content. On these tests, the student has time to think about what must be answered, they are focused on producing the correct response, and they have usually studied the grammar rules covered on the test at length. This may have influenced the students' speaking habits, thus producing a nation of Monitor over-users who are so concerned with the correctness and fluency of their speech that they are actually losing the natural ability to acquire the language. "Overuse of the Monitor results in hesitancy and subsequent difficulty in participating in conversation. Ideal or optimal use of the Monitor occurs when second language speakers use the rules they have learned without interfering with communication"³⁴⁾.

Although Krashen holds a generally critical view of extensive Monitor use, he does note its benefits in teaching simple rules which occur late in the natural order of acquisition. He contends that these 'simple rules' could be easy to 'learn' earlier, while rules that are more difficult will take longer to understand if the Monitor is used, or may never be used correctly until 'acquired'. Should this hypothesis be confirmed, it would serve to explain Japanese learners' difficulties with question forms (which require word-order inversion) and determiners. These appear in the first year of junior high school, which is their first year of formal English education³⁵⁾. According to Krashen^{36),37)}, the insertion of an article before a noun is simple to understand, however the semantics of which article to use is much more difficult. This is evident in Japanese compositions in which they frequently mistake the two. The correct use of articles is one of the last things that a Japanese learner acquires completely. This hypothesis would suggest that teachers should not

introduce articles to beginning learners, but wait until they have 'acquired' them naturally.

III. The Natural Order Hypothesis

A) Main Points

Krashen cites research on morpheme orders used by children learning their first language to suggest that there is a certain prescribed order for natural language acquisition. He goes on to say that morpheme studies on children and adults has shown a definite order in which the language was acquired by second language learners, regardless of their first language backgrounds³⁸⁾. He states that this order is only apparent in communicative activities, and that when adults focus on grammar, this order disappears as the Monitor takes over.

Finally, he states that the acquisition of this grammatical order comes in stages rather than steps, with certain functions in each stage acquired in a different order by individual learners, but that functions in a higher stage are unlikely to be acquired before functions at a lower stage³⁹⁾.

B) Merits

Numerous studies have been conducted in this area, most of which tend to confirm the existence of some sort of natural order in language acquisition⁴⁰⁾. Ellis summarizes the main points of these studies as follows: 1) instruction does not circumvent the processes responsible for the sequence of development evident in transitional structures such as negatives and interrogatives in naturalistic SLA; 2) when classroom learners are required to produce structures beyond their competence, idiosyncratic forms are likely to result; 3) the distorted input may prolong certain stages of development and slow down the emergence of some grammatical features; and 4) classroom learners are able to make use of knowledge acquired through formal instruction when they are focused on form.

Krashen states that, although there is a general order in which second language learners acquire the language, it is not necessary to pay particular attention to a prescribed grammatical order in developing a syllabus. Rather, by continuously providing comprehensible input, a teacher will be providing enough material for each student to acquire the language in their own particular order and at their own pace⁴¹⁾. This would free the teacher to spend more time on communicative activities rather than adhering to a strictly outlined syllabus.

Adherence to the Natural Order Hypothesis would also allow the teacher to spend less time correcting student errors, as it assumes that they were caused by the learner's attempt to express themselves using a form which they had not yet acquired. Thus, the teacher could spend more time on other activities designed to promote acquisition of the language.

C) Demerits

Criticisms concerning the validity of this hypothesis include those of McLaughlin⁴²⁾, who points out that the studies that Krashen uses to support his arguments were cross-sectional (as opposed to longitudinal), and are therefore unable to reveal acquisitional sequence. Ellis⁴³⁾ also questions the reliability of establishing a natural order based on evidence coming from a learner's output, which is variable according to style.

Probably one of the strongest criticisms against the Natural Order Hypothesis could be its lack of usefulness for the language teacher. As pointed out by Krahnke, "the hypothesis says little about how the vocabulary, pragmatics, phonology, and other aspects of language are acquired; little about the relationship of instruction to the order of acquisition (frequency of

exposure and sequence of instruction) ; and little about the well-documented individual variation in the order of acquisition"⁴⁴).

Indeed, Krashen uses only studies of morpheme order to substantiate his claims. He hypothesizes that regardless of the order taught, learners will acquire in their own individual order and at their own speed, therefore we should merely be concerned with providing optimal comprehensible input of a 'roughly tuned' type. However, this serves no purpose in assisting the teacher with the development of a syllabus, and could actually have the opposite effect of making the teacher feel unnecessary and helpless in the learning process. Krashen should provide more information on the order of various structures and grammar points that would form 'one stage' of acquisition in order to allow the teacher to more fully comprehend the individual levels and variations the learner could be expected to go through on the route to acquisition. As it stands, the Natural Order Hypothesis has the dangerous potential of leaving the teacher feeling ineffectual or obsolete.

D) Japan

The Natural Order Hypothesis seems to account for the common errors and 'idiosyncratic forms' so common in Japanese students' speech, as most are forced to learn structures beyond their competence. The concept that grammar is acquired in stages could force a change in textbook development in Japan to provide for a great deal more comprehensible input, or 'focus on meaning', particularly for initial levels. While textbook format has improved, and includes more dialogs and fewer grammatical explanations, the teaching methodology used in most schools still emphasizes the teaching of specific grammar points. Each lesson often focuses on one or two specific points that must be memorized before going on to the next lesson. These points are rarely reviewed, and the next time they appear is generally on a test. In addition, fairy tales and reading texts covering current topics are often analyzed for grammar and specific meaning (as opposed to being read for content). Thus, this hypothesis supports the restructuring of the language syllabus into one that is more communicative, and gives some general suggestions as to what should be focused on for learners at different levels.

IV. The Input Hypothesis

A) Main Points

Krashen regards this hypothesis as the most crucial portion of his total theory of second language acquisition⁴⁵. Its basic tenet is that in order to successfully acquire a language, learners must be exposed in stages, always receiving 'comprehensible input' in the form of simplified language. This is known as 'caretaker talk' (for young children acquiring their first language), 'teacher talk' (for students in a second language learning classroom), 'foreigner talk' (for foreign language learners exposed to native speakers in a natural setting), or 'interlanguage talk' (for second language learners exposed to the speech of other second language acquirers). These forms of speech are all based on a need for communication as opposed to focusing on the form of the language. In attempting to supply the language learner with the comprehensible input necessary for acquisition (Krashen refers to it as 'i+1', with 'i' signifying the learner's present stage of acquisition, and '+1' used to indicate the next stage in the natural order), instructors should 'roughly tune' their talk to comply with the learners level without focusing on any single grammatical point.

Krashen claims that the Input Hypothesis can account for what is commonly known to linguists as the 'silent period' because, during the initial stages of exposure to a language, a learner would be silent in order to "build up competence by active listening, via input"⁴⁶⁾.

B) Merits

Krashen states that the Input Hypothesis justifies the rationale that the communicative approach to language learning is more effective than methods such as audio-lingual, grammar-translation, etc., all of which are grammar-based and designed primarily for 'learning'. He cites various methods of instruction based on providing comprehensible input which have achieved dramatic results on tests of both comprehension and grammar⁴⁷⁾. This viewpoint is generally supported, as epitomized by VanPatten⁴⁸⁾, "Critical examination of this hypothesis will continue to spark controversy, but in the meantime, there is consensus in second language circles on the following: access to meaningful input is somehow a critical factor in successful language learning".

Pica⁴⁹⁾ points out that Krashen's Input Hypothesis has had a major effect on the communicative approach to language teaching because it stresses the need for teacher-student and student-student interaction on an equal level rather than the traditional 'teacher-fronted format' or communicative methods which allow the more communicatively competent students to dominate. Krashen's suggested methods include tasks which have a 'two-way informational requirement' (thus making it impossible for one student to manipulate the conversation), and which allow the teacher to take a position of facilitator (rather than teacher). This gives the learners greater opportunity to negotiate meaning and control conversations on a level that would allow them the greatest amount of comprehensible input.

Krashen's call for teacher talk that is 'roughly tuned' to learner levels (without focusing on one particular function or on the next stage of the natural order) seems to make sense for a language classroom. This is because it indicates that the teacher's language use can be appropriate for multiple learners at different stages of acquisition.

C) Demerits

"What seems to be the bone of contention for many in foreign language teaching is the dubious value that the Input Hypothesis places on grammar instruction, forced production, and error correction: activities in which the vast majority of teachers have been engaged for years"⁵⁰⁾.

As Ellis⁵¹⁾ points out, Krashen uses a substantial base of research done on children acquiring their first language to support his argument that comprehensible input will facilitate second language acquisition. However, this data is only applicable if there is a correlation between first and second language acquisition. Although there are strong grounds for such an assumption, it has not been proven explicitly. In addition, Ellis cites arguments against 'comprehensible input', mainly that instruction based solely on input may not lead to acquisition, and that comprehensible input in the form of 'teacher talk' may lead to over-simplification and ambiguity. He states that Krashen fails to take into consideration the benefits of 'comprehensible output', which can be important in several ways, as it: 1) encourages negotiation of meaning, 2) forces the learner to move from meaning of words to focus on formal features, and 3) gives the learner chances to test out hypotheses about the target language⁵²⁾. Dunlop⁵³⁾ summarizes, "pupils learn what they are taught, in the sense that no matter how good someone is at reading in a foreign language or speaking, for instance, he or she will not achieve the same level of proficiency in writing unless

also given sufficient practice in that skill.”

Rivers⁵⁴) also stresses that listening (comprehension) and speech (production) are two different processes and therefore competency in one would not necessarily lead to competency in the other. She points to studies done at University of Minnesota suggesting the opposite of Krashen: that those who are exposed to the language in unstructured overseas work or study, without formal language instruction, had developed ingrained inaccuracies ('fossilization') which could not be corrected later. According to Shannon, "learners need to focus on form in order to revise incorrect forms that they have acquired"⁵⁵).

D) Japan

In this hypothesis, as well as all his others, Krashen has not taken cultural differences into account. For example, many Japanese learners show a tendency towards silent communication that, along with other cultural factors, makes the Japanese student a passive learner. If these students are not encouraged to produce output, it seems unlikely that they will ever produce the output themselves that would in turn lead to greater comprehensible input and the cycle of communication that leads to the acquisition of a language.

"There appears to be a strong cultural resistance to excessive verbalization and a compensating reverencing of silence and less explicit forms of expression"⁵⁶). Barnlund hypothesized that in an interpersonal encounter, Japanese people would 1) interact more selectively and with fewer persons, 2) prefer regulated to spontaneous forms of communication, 3) communicate less of themselves verbally and prefer a lower degree of personal involvement, 4) tend to limit physical as well as verbal expressiveness, 5) prefer to cope with threatening interpersonal situations by adopting predominantly passive rather than active forms of defense, 6) be less well known to themselves (since they expose and explore inner reactions less often and less thoroughly than Americans).⁵⁷

These cultural differences should be accounted for not only in the consideration of the 'silent period', but also in Japanese learner's reaction to routines and patterns. Krashen sees routines and patterns as handy but unnecessary in early language learning⁵⁸). According to Barnlund's hypothesis, Japanese people prefer regulated forms of communication, thus it would seem that patterns might be more 'comfortable' and easier to respond to than free communication. This suggests that they be used with more frequency than Krashen indicates. While this neither supports nor denies Krashen's hypothesis, it nevertheless demands that cultural differences be taken into account when considering methods of teaching foreign languages.

Another factor which seems to weaken Krashen's argument is Af Trampe's⁵⁹) statement that mere focus on message is 'differently effective', as it leads to pidginization and fossilization. This can be seen in 'Japanglish', such as 'safety car' (used for cars with high safety standards), 'daily foods' (dairy foods), etc⁶⁰).

V. The Affective Filter Hypothesis

A) Main Points

In discussing the differences between attitude and aptitude and their effects on second language learning, Krashen and Terrell⁶¹) state that aptitude mainly effects 'learning' while attitude and other 'affective variables' (motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety levels of the learner) are related to 'acquisition'. Krashen adopts Dulay and Burt's term 'affective filter'⁶²),

suggesting that learners with high motivation, positive self-image, and low anxiety levels will have a lower 'affective filter', thus leading to greater input.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis is directly related to his Input Hypothesis, because those learners with attitudes not conducive to second language acquisition will seek less input and (due to a high affective filter) be less able to process (or 'acquire') the input they receive. Conversely, those with attitudes conducive to acquisition will not only request more input, but will also be able to process more, due to a lower filter. "The filter hypothesis explains why it is possible for an acquirer to obtain a great deal of comprehensive input, and yet still stop short (and sometimes well short) of the native speaker level. When this occurs, it is due to the affective filter."⁶³⁾

B) Merits

This hypothesis implies that, in a classroom setting, the teacher's pedagogical goals should not only include supplying optimal input, but also creating a situation that promotes a low filter⁶⁴⁾. To receive the full benefit of the 'comprehensible input' to which Krashen refers in his Input Hypothesis, the students must be open to it, or have a 'low affective filter'. This includes "a positive orientation to speakers of the language, a low degree of anxiety, and at least some degree of acquirer self-confidence"⁶⁵⁾

This hypothesis calls for the construction of a classroom in which teachers spend time with each student, evaluating their goals and determining the best plan of study, developing a personal relationship based on trust and positive reinforcement, and creating an informal environment with as much natural communication and comprehensible input as possible. It also explains the different levels of acquisition by learners with the same aptitude (learners who acquire more have a 'lower affective filter'), and indicates that attitude has a greater effect on acquisition than aptitude, therefore suggesting that divisions of classes according to aptitude might not be nearly as effective as dividing them according to levels of attitude.

C) Demerits

Researchers criticize this hypothesis by stating that the filter is "impossible to operationally define"^{66),67)}. Shannon goes on to point out that the negative and positive factors that could serve to raise or lower the 'filter' vary according to individual. "One teacher commented that teaching discrete grammar points 'lowered' some of her student's Affective Filters because it gave them the comfort of the ways that they had studied English for years in their own country"⁶⁸⁾.

Moreover, the whole concept of a 'filter' or barrier to learning due to lack of motivation, self-confidence, or a relaxed atmosphere seems to go beyond the field of language acquisition to the whole concept of learning itself which humanistic psychologists call 'defensive Learning'⁶⁹⁾. Finally, it is virtually impossible to isolate which particular activities will lower or raise the 'filter' due to the difficulty in determining individual learner characteristics⁷⁰⁾.

D) Japan

Krashen states that creating a 'low affective filter' involves a 'positive orientation to speakers of the language, a low degree of anxiety, and at least some degree of acquirer self-confidence'⁷¹⁾. Needless to say, the extremely stressful Japanese examination system is detrimental to lowering this filter. In addition, the Japanese tendency towards self-deprecation may also lower their confidence in their language ability. Confirmation of the importance of creating a relaxing atmosphere can be seen in a survey of 39 Japanese adults studying English at a culture

center for a long period (for over five years on average). When asked what factors had enabled them to continue for so long, 74% replied 'the teacher's personality', 64% replied 'classmates', 59% replied 'the atmosphere of the class', as opposed to 49% for 'the English itself' and 46% for 'the lessons'⁷²⁾.

However, Rockelman⁷³⁾ cites the socio-cultural factors in the classroom that might make it difficult or impossible for Japanese students to feel comfortable in the relaxed atmosphere that Krashen would use to lower the affective filter. Examples of this would be the Japanese expectation of a formal teacher-student relationship, the uneasiness involved in any sort of physical contact, the Japanese student's tendency towards silence in the classroom (i. e. asking few questions, emphasis on non-verbal communication), and the expectation of student-teacher interaction in the form of lectures.

Conclusion

Littlewood summarizes the value of Krashen's theories for the foreign language classroom : "Provided that Krashen's ideas are accepted as part of a broader process of exploration ..., rather than as a basis for a new dogma, they have a lot to offer to the teacher of foreign languages in the secondary school"⁷⁴⁾. Each of Krashen's five hypotheses, when considered as broad concepts rather than indisputable theories, provide excellent 'food for thought' in developing teaching plans that encourage acquisition.

"The plus side of the Acquisition Theory on teaching method is that by its very generality, it allows for individual teacher interpretation and application"⁷⁵⁾. In other words, Krashen is "the first 'applied linguist' who has not only made theoretical ideas accessible but has also shown how these ideas might be relevant to [the teacher's] practical problems"⁷⁶⁾.

However, Krashen's hypotheses seem to suggest that by just going into a classroom, talking about whatever comes to mind, and letting the students do whatever they individually feel is right for them, student can 'acquire' a language. Krashen certainly doesn't suggest this, and goes so far as to provide a curriculum and sample syllabus⁷⁷⁾, which seems intuitively to be effective (whether taken as a concrete application of the Natural Approach or as a syllabus which supports various other communicative methods as well, as suggested by Freudenstein⁷⁸⁾). However, in a classroom without motivated students or a motivated teacher, this type of 'adherence' to the Natural Approach syllabus could actually prove to be of much greater harm than a well-taught grammar translation class, a point which is also stressed by Krahnke⁷⁹⁾.

Indeed, criticisms of Krashen's 'all embracing theory'⁸⁰⁾, use of 'purr' words⁸¹⁾, and over-simplification (Krashen's tendency to reduce all language teaching to only one universal formula - that of providing comprehensible input⁸²⁾) are mirror images of the comments used to praise his work. In other words, the same breadth that allows the teacher the freedom to interpret his hypotheses for their own convenience is what also destroys the value of Krashen's work as a theory. It is too broad, undefinable, lacks sufficient supporting research, assumes that first and second language acquisition are the same, and seems merely to reiterate communicative theories developed by other linguists.

When viewed within the framework of the Japanese foreign language education system, Krashen's Language Acquisition Hypothesis initially seems to be the answer to many problems :

- 1) The criticisms of the grammar-translation methods which has produced a nation of people

that can read and write fairly complicated English but have great difficulty carrying on the most simple conversations with a native speaker seem to suggest that the Japanese system has stressed 'learning' over 'acquisition', therefore language teachers in Japan should adopt a more communicative methods such as the Natural Approach.

2) The hesitancy and concern with errors expressed by Japanese students seem to fit in well with Krashen's Monitor over-use arguments.

3) The common errors and idiosyncratic forms of the Japanese learner's English could be accounted for by deviation from Krashen's Natural Order.

4) The lack of fluency of the Japanese learner could be attributed to the lack of comprehensible input - that is, the lack of input that is just a little beyond the learner's acquired competence⁸³⁾, as the Japanese student is given very little time to become competent in a certain point or function before they must learn the next, and listening and reading (for content) is given little emphasis in the grammar-translation methods generally used.

5) The three factors (motivation to acquire, self-confidence, relaxed atmosphere) Krashen claims are necessary to lower the Affective Filter are generally absent in the secondary school foreign language class, and has lead to exactly the lack of acquisition which Krashen predicted.

Thus, the unsuspecting teacher in Japan, lacking knowledge of linguistic theory and searching for ways to improve language acquisition in their students, might easily accept Krashen's theories and Natural Approach syllabus. As one of many communicative methods being supported so widely today, it may not have too many negative effects, and might even promote the acquisition that Krashen claims it does. However, the Natural Approach (and the Second Language Acquisition hypotheses Krashen uses to develop it) has at least one major drawback when examined in terms of the Japanese foreign language education system-lack of consideration of the effects of a specific culture on language acquisition. 'Krashen's theory is based on empirical evidence, and is drawn almost exclusively from American sources'⁸⁴⁾. Krashen suggests that after a certain period, language learners will naturally alter from a 'receptive strategy'⁸⁵⁾, and begin to produce comprehensible output. Yet, as discussed in the application of the input and Affective Filter hypotheses to EFL in Japan, there are many cultural barriers to this process which could conceivably slow it considerably or stop it all together.

Finally, whether seen as criticism or not, it should be noted that Krashen's hypotheses seem to fit not only language learning, but learning as a whole. One learns most things in a formal setting of some sort (mathematics in a classroom, driving at driving school, sports with an instructor, etc.), but to actually become proficient in whatever has been learned takes time and practice in a natural or daily setting. This, most likely, is what Krashen refers to as 'acquisition'. Perhaps it would be better to look for evidence to support Krashen's theories not in the world of language learning, but in the realm of neurological processes or cognitive development, a point duly noted by Russian psychologist Vygotsky⁸⁶⁾.

Overall, Krashen's theories seem to be comparable to theories about the existence of God - they cannot be proved one way or the other, there is much to suggest that they are true, but ultimately one must rely on faith. Unfortunately, until his work is more clearly defined and supported with valid evidence, Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory must remain in

what Gregg refers to as "that unhappy group that Sir Karl Popper characterized as 'those impressive and all-explanatory theories which act upon weak minds like revelations' "87),88).

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- 88) This paper is a revised summary of a paper submitted as coursework for an Applied Psycholinguistics course at Bishops' University, Canada, 1995.