

Language Acquisition through Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis

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Abstract

There is a vast difference between L1 and L2 learners. While L1 learners acquire information and language skills naturally through mother tongue, environment relatedness and with greater sense of autonomy, the L2 learner's acquisition of mainly language skills is made difficult due to presence of grammatical rules and structures, formalities associated with it, mental block that act as Acquisition filters, lack of proper environment and naturalness. Stephen Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" seeks to address all these issues and make L2 learning easy through providing the learners with Comprehensible inputs.

Keywords: Input Hypothesis, "i+1", comprehensible input, Acquisition filter, mental block.

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Introduction

Chomsky says that LAD or Language Acquisition Device is inbuilt in everyone. Learning or knowing leads to Acquisition, which is learning or developing of a skill? This can be done institutionally, through education. In this institutional learning the learner suffers from a mental block or Affective filter. This 'affective filter' prevents acquirers from utilizing comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition. This happens when the learner is unmotivated, lacks confidence or is anxious. For L1 learners, Acquisition of input happens informally through mother tongue. For L2 learners, acquisition is made difficult since the medium is essentially foreign to the environment. Here, monitoring and rules make learning difficult.

Objective of the study

The principle aim of the study is to relate Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" as practically viable and highly effective for L2 learners.

Hypothesis

The following is the hypothesis of the present study: Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" enables the L2 learners and the teachers to make language acquisition subconscious and natural.

Research Questions

The following are addressed in the research paper: 1) what does Krashen mean by "Input Hypothesis"? 2) How does "Input Hypothesis" facilitate the L2 learners to overcome their Acquisition filters?

Discussion

The input hypothesis, also known as the monitor model, is a group of five hypotheses of L2 acquisition developed by the linguist Stephen Krashen in the 1970s and 1980s. The hypotheses put primary importance on the comprehensible input that language learners are exposed to. Understanding spoken and written language input is seen as the only mechanism that results in the increase of underlying linguistic competence, and language output is not seen as having any effect on learners' ability.

Furthermore, Krashen claimed that linguistic competence is only advanced when language is subconsciously acquired, and that conscious learning cannot be used as a source of language production. Finally, learning is seen to be heavily dependent on the mood of the learner. Learning will be impaired if the learner is under stress or does not want to learn the language.

The Input Hypothesis states that learners progress in their knowledge of the language when they comprehend language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. Krashen called this level of input "i+1", where "i" is the learners interlanguage and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. If "i" represents

previously acquired linguistic competence and extra-linguistic knowledge, hypothesis claims that we move from “i” to “i+1” by understanding input that contains “i+1”. The “+1” represents new knowledge or language structures that we should be ready to acquire.

The Comprehensible input hypothesis can be restated in terms of the natural order hypothesis. For example, if we acquire the rules of language in a linear order 1,2,3..., then “i” represents the last rule or language form learned and “i+1” is the next structure that should be learned. What is important is that the input received must be comprehensible.

Krashen stresses that when comprehensible input is provided, “i+1” is present. If language models and the teachers provide enough comprehensible input, then the structures that acquirers are ready to learn will be present in that input. To Krashen, this is a better method of developing grammatical accuracy than direct grammar teaching. Acquisition of language is a natural, intuitive and subconscious process of which individuals need not be aware. One is unaware of the process as it is happening and when the knowledge is acquired, the acquirer generally does not realize that he or she possess any new knowledge. Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language, during which the acquirer is focused on meaning rather than form. This is possible only when the input is comprehensible.

For example, let us treat the kitchen as the language lab. Since every house has a kitchen the environment is suitable for learning. Since the learners identify themselves with the environment learning becomes natural. Inhibitions of L2 learners are shed and the mental blocks or Affective filters become minimal. Suppose the

learners are made to participate in the process of making tea, they learn the related vocabulary like ‘boil’, ‘lighter’, ‘filter’ etc., naturally. Likewise, the instructor may indulge in various grammatical structures like “will you...?” “Shall we...?” “Would you please...?” “Please add...?” “Do you want...?” “Bring the...” “Place the pot...” since these grammatical units are comprehensible inputs, learning for the L2 learners become natural and subconscious, which is what Krashen puts forth in his “Input Hypothesis.”

Conclusion

Thus we know that learners acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible inputs and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input ‘in’. L2 learning would be made more effective and natural if Krashen’s “Input Hypothesis” of “i+1” is implemented.

References

Krashen, Stephen D. The input hypothesis: Issues and implications. Longman Group UK Ltd, 1985. Print.