UNIT : 15 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION/LEARNING THEORIES - Krashen

:: STRUCTURE ::

15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will be able to:
The main learning objectives of the unit is to learn about:

- Basic language concepts.
- Functions of Language.
- Input Hypothesis: Language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language that is "just beyond their current competence."
- Affective Filter Hypothesis: Learners' emotional states can affect their ability to acquire language.
- Natural Order Hypothesis: The acquisition of grammar rules follows a natural order that is predictable across learners and languages.
- Monitor Hypothesis: Learners use a conscious grammatical "monitor" to edit their language output, but this is a limited resource and is not the primary source of language acquisition.
- Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis: Language acquisition is a subconscious process, while learning is a conscious one.

These theories have had a significant impact on language teaching and learning practices and have been widely discussed and debated in the field of second language acquisition.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is nothing more than a means of communication, a means of passing on our thoughts to one another. Language is a set of human habits that allows people to convey their thoughts and feelings. English plays a unique and dominant role in the world's communicative arena in this era of globalisation and information and communication technology. In the realm of education, it has a distinct identity. A teacher must keep the desired outcomes in mind while teaching. Effective teaching requires clear guidelines, as the effectiveness of the teaching is evaluated based on its goals and objectives.

According to Wren (2015), "In the teaching of class subjects, the actual work of mind training is being performed. In the early lessons of English, the weapons are being forged, the tools are being made with which the work of mind training is to be performed."
Language is learned via trial and error. This is the mode or manner in which language is employed in language teaching. Language has long been regarded as man's crowning achievement. It is a must-have research resource for language professionals, giving a comprehensive and authoritative overview of research in the subject of second language teaching and learning. Hence, this unit will be focusing on Stephen Krashen's core idea of Language acquisition and the theory he has proposed in the form of Five hypotheses.

15.2 NATURE OF LANGUAGE

The most important phenomenon on the planet is language. All of our behaviours are governed by language, from birth to death. Language is used to store and communicate human knowledge and culture. Only through language is it possible to think. We make use of language in our dreams. Every area of human life is dominated by language. It is, in reality, a criterion by which we can be distinguished from other beings. Language is a tool for exchanging information.

Language allows us to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others. Society would be impossible without language. Language is a remarkable artifact that has swept the globe, seeing the evolution of civilization, culture, and technology. By filling in gaps, language entangles the apprehensions of communication and connects linkages connecting people of various groups, regions, and years.

Learning, understanding, and interpreting the language as a component of the mother tongue spoken in a certain place and community may not be difficult. The acquisition of a mother tongue is not a must. Because the entire system supports an individual's growth, it is an acquisition.

15.3 AN OVERVIEW OF STEPHEN KRASHEN'S VIEWS OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

According to Krashen, the process of learning a second language is remarkably similar to the process of learning a first language. It necessitates meaningful contact in the new language—natural

communication—in which speakers are more concerned with the messages they are communicating and understanding than with the language's grammatical shape. Error correction and explicit rule teaching, according to Krashen, are not crucial in language acquisition. Rather than focusing on the form of the language, learners learn best when they concentrate on the aim of speaking.

When dealing with nonnative speakers of a language, native speakers instinctively change their speech into shorter, less complex phrases to make it easier for second language learners to grasp. This style of language is usually referred to as "foreigner speak" in the literature.

Mothers also use pitch and intonation to assist their newborns acquire their first language by spontaneously modifying their speech into shorter, less difficult phrases. This form of language is referred to as "motherese" in the literature.

Language changes that occur during foreigner speak and motherese are supposed to aid the learning process by making the language more understandable to the learner.

Krashen is most known for his "comprehensible input" hypothesis, which proposes that learners learn language by consuming and comprehending material that is "just beyond" their current level of ability.

Comprehensible input is defined by Krashen as 'i+1', where 'I' is the learner's present level of proficiency and '+1' is the degree of proficiency immediately beyond it. Krashen cites examples of "foreigner talk" and "motherese" as examples of input that is slightly beyond the learner's current level of competency as examples of "comprehensible input."

A preschooler, for example, understands the sentence "Get your crayon." The teacher can provide an adequate challenge by slightly modifying the phrase to "Get my crayons please," delivering fresh information that builds on existing knowledge. It's understandable because it's only slightly different.

Another concept that has gained widespread recognition among researchers and ELL educators is Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that a person's emotions can either aid or hinder the acquisition of a new language. Studying a new language, according to Krashen, differs from learning other topics in that it necessitates public practice.

Anxiety, humiliation, or wrath might arise when speaking in a foreign language. These unpleasant emotions might act as a filter, preventing the learner from processing new or challenging words.

Classrooms that are completely engaging, non-threatening, and affirming of a child's original language and cultural heritage might improve a student's ability to learn by raising motivation and encouraging risk taking. These circumstances "decrease" the emotive filter, which can prevent learning.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Write a brief note on Nature of Languge.

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2. Discuss Krashen's idea of Language Acquisition

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15.4 KRASHEN'S SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY

Stephen Krashan is an expert in the field of theories of language acquisition and language development. In the past a few decades, he has published more than 100 books and articles and has delivered over 300 lectures at different universities across United States and Canada. Krashen, as part of Second Langauge Acquisition theory has proposed Five hypotheses which are as follows:

a. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis
b. The Monitor Hypothesis
c. The Natural Order Hypothesis
d. The Input Hypothesis
e. The Affective Filter Hypothesis

a. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis:

The distinction between acquisition and learning is possibly the most fundamental of all the hypotheses discussed here. Adults can achieve competence in a second language in one of two methods, according to the study.

The first method is language acquisition, which is comparable to, if not identical to, how children learn language skills in their native tongue. Language acquisition is a subconscious process; language learners are frequently unaware that they are learning a language and are only concerned with communicating.

Acquired competence, which is the product of language acquisition, is also subconscious. The rules of the languages we've learned are usually not something we're aware of. Rather, we have a "feel" for what is correct. Even if we don't know what rule was broken, grammatical statements "sound" or "feel" right, whereas errors "feel" wrong.

Although error correction has little or no influence on subconscious learning, it is regarded to be beneficial for conscious learning. Error correction is said to assist learners in inducing or "figuring out" the correct form of a rule. If a student of English as a second language says "I goes to school every day," and the teacher corrects him or her by repeating the sentence correctly, the learner should recognise that the /s/ ending belongs to the third person, not the first, and change his or her conscious mental representation of the rule. Although this appears to be reasonable, it is unclear whether error correction has this effect in practice (Fanselow, 1977; Long, 1977).

The evidence from child language acquisition confirms that error correction has little impact on learning. Brown and his team investigated that parents only modify a small percentage of their children's vocabulary (occasional pronunciation issues, specific verbs, and foul language!). They draw the conclusion from their research that parents respect the truth value of what their children say significantly more than the form. According to Brown, Cazden, and Bellugi (1973), a statement like this: Her curl my hair "was approved, because the mother was, in fact, curling Eve's hair" (p. 330).

b. The Monitor Hypothesis:

The acquisition-learning difference asserts that two distinct processes occur in adults, but it does not specify how they are utilised in second language performance. According to the Monitor hypothesis, acquisition and learning are applied in very precise ways. Acquisition is accountable for our fluency and "initiates" our utterances in a second language. Learning serves only one purpose: to act as a monitor or editor. After our speech has been "generated" by the acquired system, learning comes into play simply to make adjustments in the shape of our utterance. This can happen before or after we speak or write (self-correction).

According to the Monitor hypothesis, formal rules or conscious learning play only a minor part in second language proficiency. As research has progressed in recent years, these limits have become even more apparent. Only three conditions must be met for second language performers to employ conscious rules. These prerequisites are both required and sufficient; that is, even if all three conditions are met, a performer may not fully exploit his conscious grammar. The following is a list of various conditions, along with a brief description.

(i) The passage of time: A second language performer must have enough time to think about and apply conscious norms effectively. Most people don't have enough time to think about and apply rules during typical speech. Overuse of rules in communication can lead to problems, such as a hesitant way of speaking and a lack of attention to what the other person is saying.

(ii) Emphasis on the form: Time is insufficient to adequately use the Monitor. The performer must also be focused on form, or thinking about

how things should be done correctly (Dulay and Burt, 1978). Even when we have plenty of time, we may become so engrossed in what we're saying that we overlook how we're saying it.
(iii) Know the Rules: This is an extremely difficult criterion. Linguistics has shown us that language structure is incredibly complex, and they claim to have only characterised a fraction of the world's most well-known languages. We know that our students are only exposed to a small portion of the language's overall grammar, and we also know that even the top students do not learn every rule they encounter.

To conclude, monitor hypothesis uses items that are "late acquired" in the natural order, i.e., items that the performer has learnt but not acquired, to advance in rank. Only certain objects can rise in rank, but when Monitor usage is high, even a small increase in rank is enough to disrupt the natural order.

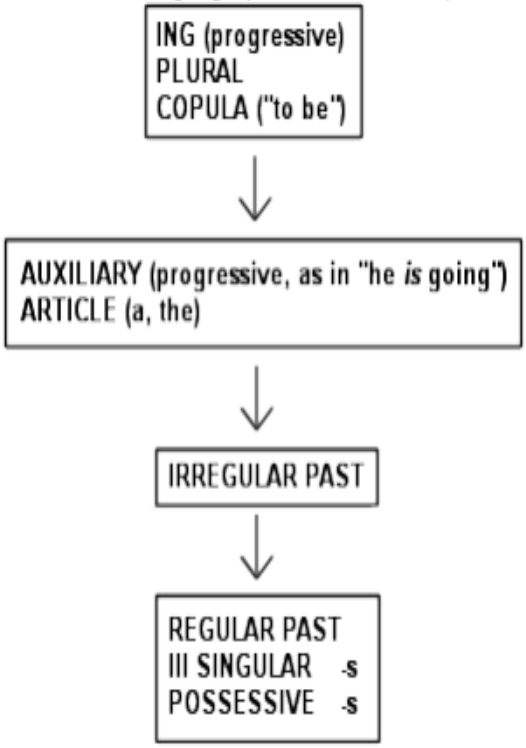
c. The Natural Order Hypothesis:
The discovery that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a predictable pattern has been one of the most exciting developments in language acquisition research in recent years. Certain grammatical structures are acquired early by language learners, whereas others are acquired later. Individual acquirers do not necessarily agree all the time, but there are evident, statistically significant commonalities.
When it comes to the natural order hypothesis, English is probably the most researched language, and morphology is the most studied of all the language's structures. Brown (1973) found that children learning English as a first language learned some grammatical morphemes, or function words, earlier than others. The progressive marker 'ing' (as in "He is playing baseball.") and the plural marker /s/ ("two dogs") were among the first morphemes learned, whereas the third person singular marker /s/ (as in "He lives in New York") and the possessive /s/ ("John's hat") were learned much later, anywhere from six months to a year later. Brown's longitudinal findings were cross-sectionally verified by de Villiers and de Villiers (1973), who discovered that elements that Brown found to be acquired the earliest in time were also the ones that children tended to get right most often. In other words, the difficulty order for the morphemes studied was identical to the acquisition order.

Dulay and Burt (1974, 1975) reported shortly after Brown's findings that youngsters learning English as a second language, regardless of their first language, demonstrate a "natural order" for grammatical morphemes. The sequence in which children learned their second languages differed from the order in which they learned their first languages, although diverse groups of second language learners shared significant similarities.

Andersen (1976), who employed composition, Krashen, Houck, Giunchi, Bode, Birnbaum, and Strei (1977), who used free speech, and Christison (1979), who also used free speech, are some of the studies that confirmed the natural order in adults for grammatical morphemes. Adult study with the SLOPE test verifies the natural order and expands the data set.

Krashen, Sferlazza, Feldman, and Fathman (1976) discovered an order that was close to Fathman's (1975) infant second language order, and Kayfetz-Fuller (1978) used the SLOPE test to discover a natural order. As previously stated, the order of acquisition for a second language differs from that of a first language, yet there are some commonalities. Krashen (1977) provides an average in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1. *"Average" order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for English as a second language (children and adults)*



d. The Input Hypothesis:

For two reasons, we shall devote significantly more time to this theory than to the others. To begin with, much of this information is new, although the other possibilities have already been documented and explored in various books and papers. The second reason is its theoretical and practical significance. The input hypothesis tries to answer what is arguably the most crucial topic in our discipline, and provides a response that could have significance in all aspects of language teaching.

The crucial question is, "How do we learn languages?" If the Monitor hypothesis is right, and acquisition is core while learning is more peripheral, then acquisition should be the objective of our teaching. The topic of how we acquire becomes critical at this point.

The input hypothesis claims that understanding input that contains I + 1 is a required (but not sufficient) condition for moving from stage I to stage I

+ 1, where "understand" indicates that the acquirer is focused on the meaning rather than the form of the message.

In other words, we acquire only when we comprehend language with structure that is "a bit beyond" where we are presently.

The input hypothesis contradicts our standard pedagogical approach to teaching second and foreign languages. Our assumption has been, as Hatch (1978) points out, that we learn structures first, then practise utilising them in communication, and that this is how fluency develops. The input hypothesis asserts the inverse. It claims that we develop structure by "going for meaning" first.

Parts (1) and (2) of the input hypothesis can thus be stated as follows:

(1) The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning.

(2) We acquire by understanding language that contains structure beyond our current level of competence (i + 1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information.

According to a third element of the input hypothesis, input must contain I + 1 in order to be effective for language acquisition, but it does not have to have only I + 1. It means if the acquirer understands the input and there is sufficient of it, I + 1 will be delivered automatically. In other words, I + 1 is delivered if communication is successful. This means that the optimum input should avoid attempting to aim for I + 1 on purpose. We've all seen syllabi that attempt to cover I + 1 on purpose. There is a "structure of the day," and both the teacher and the student usually believe that the lesson's purpose is to teach or practice a certain grammatical item or structure.

The syllabus moves on to the next structure once this one has been "mastered." This component of the input hypothesis argues that a conscious effort to provide I + 1 isn't required. There are reasons to believe it could even be dangerous.

As a result, section (3) of the input hypothesis is as follows:

(3) When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, i + 1 will be provided automatically.

Speaking fluency cannot be taught directly, according to the final element of the input hypothesis. Rather, it "emerges" on its own over time. According to this viewpoint, the best, and maybe only, approach to educate speaking is to simply supply understandable input. When the acquirer feels "ready," early speech will emerge; however, this level of preparedness will arrive at different dates for different people. Furthermore, early speech is frequently grammatically incorrect. As the acquirer hears and understands more information, accuracy improves. The following is part (4) of the input hypothesis:

(4) Production ability emerges. It is not taught directly.

e. The Affective Filter Hypothesis:

The Affective Filter hypothesis describes how affective elements influence the acquisition of a second language. Dulay and Burt (1977) suggested the concept of an Affective Filter, which is congruent with theoretical work in the domain of affective factors and second language acquisition.

Over the last decade, research has demonstrated that a variety of affective characteristics are linked to second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). They are as follows;

a. Motivation: Motivational performers do better in second language acquisition (which is frequently, but not always, "integrative").
b. Self-confidence: Performers who have a positive self-image and are self-assured do better in second language acquisition.
c. Anxiety: Low anxiety, whether measured in terms of personal or classroom anxiety, appears to be beneficial to second language acquisition.

The Affective Filter hypothesis posits that acquirers differ in terms of the strength or level of their Affective Filters, which represents the link between affective characteristics and the process of second language acquisition. Those with poor attitudes for second language acquisition will not only seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter, which means that even if they understand the message, the input will not reach the language acquisition device or the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition. Those with more favourable views toward Second Language Acquisition will seek and get more input, as well as having a lower or weaker filter. They will be more receptive to the information, and it will have a "deeper" impact on them (Stevick, 1976).

Check Your Progress 2

1. The Acquisition-Learning hypothesis

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2. The Monitor hypothesis

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3. The Natural Order hypothesis

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4. The Input hypothesis

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5. The Affective Filter hypothesis

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

In conclusion, Krashen's view on second language acquisition is centered around the idea that acquisition is a natural process driven by exposure to the target language in a low-anxiety, supportive environment. He proposes the "Input Hypothesis," which states that language acquisition occurs when the learner receives input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. Krashen also argues that the affective filter, which is influenced by emotional factors such as anxiety and self-confidence, plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Overall, Krashen's theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the process of second language acquisition and highlights the importance of creating a positive and supportive learning environment for language learners.

15.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- BROWN, R. (1973) A First Language. Cambridge: Harvard Press.
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