The Comprehension Hypothesis Today: An Interview with Stephen Krashen

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Abstract

The problem of second language acquisition and its true nature is a controversial issue in second language teaching. Different camps propose different methods to approach the very nature of second language acquisition. Among these, Stephen Krashen and his advocates raised the issue of implicit second language teaching and the prominence of input that are expounded in the present article. In so doing, some criticisms put forth by proponents of explicit second language teaching will be presented and answered briefly by Krashen in an interview..

1 Introduction

Stephen Krashen's hypotheses have been met both with enthusiastic support and vigorous objections. Core to his theory is the *Comprehension Hypothesi*s, the view that we acquire language in only one way – when we understand what people tell us and what we read. This hypothesis also states that true language acquisition occurs without our conscious awareness and is stored in the brain subconsciously (Krashen, 2010). We are not aware of our competence.

This controversial hypothesis is connected to several other equally controversial claims. A corollary of the Comprehension Hypothesis is the hypothesis that actual language production plays only an indirect role in language acquisition, and that consciously learned grammar rules function only as a monitor or editor (the *Monitor Hypothesis*); learning the rules is not a prerequisite to language acquisition. In regard to this sharp distinction between learned and acquired knowledge (the *Learning-Acquisition Hypothesis*), Krashen was strongly criticized by many opponents such as Gregg (1984). Following this, the *Natural Order Hypothesis*, which postulates a predetermined plan in the process of language acquisitions, was challenged on the grounds that it would fail to account for the considerable influence of the first language on the acquisition of a second language (L2). Finally, it was hypothesized that affective factors can play a debilitative role, if the affective

filter of language learners is raised (the *Affective Filter Hypothesis*). By affective filter, Krashen means the barriers that could impede the process of absorbing input and transforming it into intake (1977, 1981).

Despite the ongoing debate among the scholars since Krashen's proposed hypotheses, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no attempt has yet been made to provide a comprehensive report of the controversies and to seek Krashen's response to all the criticisms. Hence, it was felt that there is a need to summarize these criticisms, find out Krashen's current stance with regard to them, and discuss the issues thoroughly.

2   Krashen's hypotheses

2.1   The Learning-Acquisition Hypothesis

Krashen (1985) claims that the Learning-Acquisition Hypothesis is the most basic of his five hypotheses, and believes that adult L2 learners have two separate paths to internalize the second language they wish to acquire.

The first path is acquisition, a *subconscious process*, through which the learner will obtain L2 competence naturally, similar to the process of a child who internalizes his L1 implicitly. Krashen further points out that this kind of competence is accumulated subconsciously with no awareness. If you ask a native speaker to judge the grammaticality of an utterance, s/he can judge it intuitively without even being aware of which grammatical rule is violated, and s/he is not able to explain the language rules either (Krashen, 1987). Therefore, it would be only a mere language pick-up (Brown, 2000). In contrast, the other path is a *conscious knowledge compilation process*. The learner is taught the L2 grammatical rules directly, and can obtain the ability to explain the rules and judge their grammaticality in a given utterance using such knowledge. An explicit teaching procedure is applied here, and the learner should be able to extend the rules to a similar context. Krashen calls such knowledge "Know-about" knowledge (Krashen, 1987).

Krashen believes that fluency in L2 is solely the result of acquisition, not learning, and that L2 learners must be involved in acquiring knowledge as much as possible (Brown, 2000). Therefore, error correction has little or no role in subconscious acquisition. All in all, he believes that the process of acquisition and learning is not bidirectional. This means that learning may never lead to acquisition and vice versa.

This sharp distinction between learning and acquisition based on the definition of consciousness was, however, met with strong criticisms. McLaughlin (1990), for instance, refutes such a sharp distinction based on the fact that psychologists still have difficulty giving an exhaustive definition for the notion of consciousness. Hence, he finds that it would be implausible to extend this fuzzy distinction to the process of language acquisition and to make strong claims based on it (Brown, 2007). Besides, there is no empirical evidence which supports the exclusive dichotomy of learning and acquisition, as in "human behaviors we almost always define the endpoints of a continuum" (p. 296) rather than categories. According to research, form focused instruction can help learners improve their communicative competence according to their styles and strategies (Norris & Ortega, 2000), since learned knowledge may lead to improvements in the process of acquisition.

2.2   The Natural Order Hypothesis

Krashen (1981) believes that L2 acquisition follows a natural order. This means that we can predict the sequence (e.g. morphemes) of acquisition. Based on different studies conducted on L1 acquisition (Brown, 1973; De Viliers & De Viliers, 1973), he concludes that there must be a natural order in acquiring a L2, and studies on L2 acquisition support the predictability of such an order. Despite some differences between L1 and L2 acquisition, L2 learners have shown striking similarities in this regard and were almost consistent in the order of acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Kessler & Idar, 1977, as cited in Krashen, 1997). However, as Gregg (1984) argues, to generalize the results of a study on the acquisition of a limited set of English morphemes to L2 acqui-

sition as a whole is fallible. Morpheme studies offer no indications that second language learners similarly acquire other linguistic features (phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) in any predictable sequence, let alone in any sequence at all.

Secondly, the Natural Order Hypothesis fails to account for the considerable influence of L1 on the acquisition of an L2; in fact, the results of other studies (e.g. Zafar, 2009) indicate that L2 learners acquire a L2 in different orders, depending on their native languages. Therefore, despite what the Natural Order Hypothesis claims, L2 learners do not necessarily acquire grammatical structures in a predictable sequence.

2.3   The Monitor Hypothesis

The Monitor Model pertains to the operational application of learned knowledge. In the same vein, how learned knowledge may be useful to achieve fluency is of importance. Krashen (1981, 1987) contends that acquired knowledge is the stimulus for the development of speech and that learning may come into play to make changes when three conditions are met. First, there must be enough *time* for the performer. Second, the performer must *focus on form*, while carrying out the task. Lastly, s/he must *know the rules* to be able to apply them. When these three conditions are met, monitoring takes place either before or after producing the utterance. However, these three conditions are necessary but not sufficient for monitoring to take place. Performers might not utilize the learned knowledge, even if these conditions are met (Krashen, 1981). In addition, the simplicity of learned knowledge is of paramount importance. As long as the learned rules are easy to apply and not too complex, monitoring seems to be more efficient.

Moreover, Krashen divides monitor users into three types: over-users, optimal users and under-users (Chastain, 1988). The over-usage of monitoring for the first group would be at the expense of their fluency, since they are all the time obsessed with the grammaticality of their speech. Optimal users use monitoring whenever it does not interfere in the process of communication. Finally, under-users are those who do not use their conscious knowledge, because they do not have a good command of it or prefer not to use it. According to Stafford and Covitt (1978, as cited in Krashen 1987), they only pay *lip service* to the value of conscious grammar and are typically not influenced by error correction.

Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis has been criticized as well. A major criticism is that he relegates language monitoring to a peripheral position in language acquisition. It is seen as simply being a post-learning process, a tool for use of language in certain conditions. However, researchers such as Rubin (1975) have pointed to monitoring as a basic learning strategy. In addition, Ellis (2003) points out that monitoring is one of the five major aspects of successful language learning: 1) attention to language form that includes monitoring; 2) attention to communication; 3) awareness of the learning process; 4) organizing one's work, and thinking about how to learn; and 5) ability to use strategies flexibly.

2.4   The Input Hypothesis

The Input Hypothesis could be considered the most influential hypothesis in L2 acquisition, as it provides theoretical and practical foundations for the way L2 learners internalize the knowledge. It is exclusively attributed to acquisition, not learning. Krashen (1977) contends that the input provided for learners must be roughly tuned to their level of proficiency. This is what we know as the popular formula of i+1, not i+0 or i+2. Learners can compensate this gap by using context, knowledge of the world and extra linguistic information (Krashen, 1987). He further adds that there must be enough of i+1 for acquisition to take place, and this will happen when communication is successful. When input is understood, then i+1 will be provided automatically. This is contrary to the old view of language learning (Hatch, 1978), which states that fluency can be developed through the learning of structures and practicing. Krashen hypothesizes that language acquisition is completely the opposite. This means that we acquire language by first understanding the message and then acquiring its structures.

The Input Hypothesis was also criticized from two angles. First, the novelty of i+1 formula is under question. This idea is close to what Ausubel (1963) put forth as Meaningfulness or 'Subsumability.' Based on 'Subsumability,' the received information should be roughly tuned to the existing cognitive structure that is very similar to Krashen's i+1. In addition, defining i and 1 is a problematic issue (Brown, 2007), as they cannot be clearly defined. Second, the idea that acquisition takes place with enough i+1 is challenged by the argument that "input is necessary but not sufficient for acquisition to take place" (Ellis, 2003, p. 47).

2.5 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen (1987) hypothesizes that one of the most important barriers towards acquisition of another language is the affective filter. This would impede the process of absorbing input and transforming it into intake. There are three factors which play a significant role in this process. The first is *self-confidence*. The stronger the self-confidence, the better the absorption of input will be. It means that a good amount of self confidence will lower the affective filter in order to let the input in. The second factor is anxiety. The more anxious the person is, the higher the amount of resistance against absorption of input will be. That is, the affective filter will be raised with a high amount of pressure on the person, hence obstructing the process of acquisition. The last factor is *motivation*. The more motivated the person is, the better the process will be.

The final critique of Krashen's Monitor Model questions the claim of the Affective Filter Hypothesis that affective factors alone account for individual variation in second language acquisition. First, Krashen claims that children lack the affective filter that causes most adult second language learners to never completely master their second language (Zafar, 2009). Such a claim fails to withstand scrutiny because children also experience differences in non-linguistic variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety that supposedly account for child-adult differences in second language learning. Besides, there are many cases in which adults acquired a native-like proficiency (Brown, 2007).

2.6 Summary

In summary, there were a considerable number of criticisms leveled against these five hypotheses, some of which like the *Noticing Hypothesis* (Schmidt, 1990) were in complete opposition to Krashen's idea. Others, such as the *Interaction Hypothesis* (Long, 1983) and the *Output Hypothesis* (Swain & Lapkin, 1995) were complementary. As one of the first criticisms, it was mentioned that the process of language acquisition is not as simple as what Krashen claims. By merely considering input as the only causative variable in L2 acquisition, Krashen ascribes little role to the learners' engagement in the process (Brown, 2007). To overcome this drawback, Swain (1995) proposed the Output Hypothesis, arguing that output is at least as important as input, if not more. The Output Hypothesis was based on the idea that output "generates highly specific input that our cognitive system needs to build up a coherent set of knowledge" (De Bot, 1996, p. 529). Long (1983) proposed the Interaction Hypothesis and emphasized the role of modified input achieved through negotiation, explanation and modifications among conversation parties. A stronger hypothesis known as the Noticing Hypothesis was proposed by Schmidt (1990), which underlines the role of consciousness and awareness as a necessary condition for acquisition to happen. Based on research in L2 acquisition and cognitive psychology, he claims that without attention we can learn almost nothing, as 'attention' is a prerequisite in the process of language acquisition (Ellis, 2003),

Finally, Krashen's critics assert that input-based second language learners have paramount problems with their grammatical structures and make a lot of grammatical errors. Letting students decide when to speak on their own would be problematic. Some reserved language learners may never get their feet wet and start speaking. To address this controversial discussion, in the following section, we report an interview with Professor Krashen addressing some of the objections that have been raised.

3   The interview

As there were many criticisms leveled against Krashen's controversial hypotheses, the researchers tried to address them in an interview format. It was attempted to find out how Krashen would respond to all of his critics. To this end, 14 questions were prepared. Each question would address one of the key objections to the hypotheses and the possible modifications that the hypotheses have gone through recently. The interview was conducted through e-mail in 2010. It took almost a month for all of the questions to be answered one at a time. The outcome of the interview is reported in the following section.

3.1   Questions and answers

1)   You have hypothesized that we acquire language when we understand messages, a very simple idea. Some critics have claimed that second language acquisition cannot be explained as simply as you explain it. What is your reaction?

SK: *Some critics say, "No, it couldn't be that simple. It must be more complicated." Such statements are not arguments, but are statements of belief. I wonder if physicists reacted the same way when Einstein said e = mc2. Did they say, "It couldn't be that simple, the formula must be much more complicated?" What matters, of course, is what the evidence says, not someone's idea of how things should be.*

2)   McLaughlin (1990) disputed your distinction between subconscious (acquisition) and conscious (learning) processes. He said: "I believe that these terms are too laden with surplus meaning and too difficult to define empirically to be useful theoretically."

SK: *Acquisition and learning are no more difficult to define empirically as their synonyms, implicit and explicit learning, terms that McLaughlin and other critics have no problem using.*

3)   Your sharp distinction between acquisition and learning and the statement that there is no overlap between them are controversial. Brown (2000), for example, says that they are more on a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

SK: *Brown simply made the claim that it should be a continuum. He did not present any data or even arguments, only that he felt it was more reasonable.*

4)   Schmidt (2001) disputes the claim that language acquisition does not involve attention. He claims that "people learn about the things they attend to and do not learn much about the thing they do not attend to" (p. 30). Thus, he strongly disagrees with you. How do you comment on that?

SK: *The last 30 years of research in language acquisition shows that people certainly can acquire language without paying attention to form. The fact that acquirers use rules they have never learned, rules that in fact linguists have not even described, confirms that attending to form is not necessary. John Truscott has an excellent discussion of Schmidt's claim in his 1998 paper.*

5)   You have claimed that learned knowledge cannot be converted to acquired knowledge, a 'non-interface' hypothesis. However, we have two other related claims. Sharwood Smith (1981) and DeKeyser (1998) hold to a 'strong interface' claim that learned knowledge is the only source of acquired knowledge, and Ellis (2003) argues for a 'weak interface' position, stating that explicitly learned knowledge works as a facilitator to help the development of implicit knowledge. To what extent do you agree with Ellis, who seems to give conscious learning a more limited role?

SK: *I don't agree with either position, strong or weak interface, because the data/experimental results do not support either position. My arguments are outlined in Krashen (1987), Principles and Practice, now available for free at www.sdkrashen.com, and are updated in Krashen (2003). Consciously learned grammar rules have little or no effect on unmonitored performance: Grammar instruction shows a clear effect only when subjects are used who are familiar with grammar study, and are given tests in which they focus on form. And the effects are weak (small) and fragile; they are rapidly forgotten. In my view, studies claiming to show the effectiveness of grammar instruction in reality show the opposite. Truscott (1998) arrived at similar conclusions, published several years before my 2003 book. I discovered his paper after my book was published.*

6) Swain (1985) presents evidence that output generation is at least as important as input, if not more so. What do you think of this claim?

SK: *Swain's evidence is not convincing to me. Swain only noted that children in French immersion classes after many years were not perfect in French and didn't talk much in class and concluded that output was a major factor in acquisition. I have argued that the reason French immersion students aren't even better than they are, is a lack of certain kinds of input: They don't do pleasure reading in French and they don't interact with peers in French. The Comprehension Hypothesis predicts that the problem is lack of input, not lack of output.*

7) In your articles, you mentioned the scarcity of output. Do you reject the Output Hypothesis entirely or do you believe that output is too rare to play an important role in the acquisition process?

SK: *The finding that comprehensible output (CO) is rare certainly damages any hypothesis that it is necessary for acquisition, and raises the suspicion that it does not help at all. There is good evidence that it plays no direct role in language acquisition. People can acquire language to high levels of competence without producing any or producing very little output (see e.g. Krashen, 2007a). Most important, as I argued in Krashen (2003), the failure to show that more comprehensible output results in more language acquisition suggests that it is, in fact, useless for acquiring language. (It could help indirectly, however, by inviting more comprehensible input.)*

8) Seliger (1983) showed that high input generators compared to low input generators improved at a faster rate, because they generate more input through interaction. Comment?

SK: This observation is fully consistent with the Comprehension Hypothesis. Output in this case has an indirect effect. It is used as a means of encouraging input.

9) The i+1 formula was challenged by virtue of the fact that it is not something new; it is found in Ausubel's terms of Subsumability and Meaningfulness. Also Gregg (1984) and White (1987) questioned the hypothesis, because we are not able to define clearly what i and 1 are.

SK: *I included a discussion of the i+1 issue in Krashen (1985). I argued that we don't have to know precisely where each student is, what his or her i and i+1 is: Optimal input, I have hypothesized, automatically contains i+1 if there is enough of it and if it is comprehensible. Similarly, we do not need to know all details about the order of acquisition to support the Natural Order and Comprehension Hypotheses. We have more than enough evidence to support the hypothesis that there is a fairly predictable order of acquisition.*

Is the concept of i+1 new? If another scholar discovered this concept before I did, and provided evidence, this is very good news for the hypothesis.

10) With regard to the fact that the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis requires letting the students produce language whenever they wish to, what would happen to those whose silent period will never end?

SK: *We don't have any cases of lifetime silent periods with normal language acquirers. What we have are cases in which the silent period lasts longer than some people expect it to last, those unfamiliar with the language acquisition process and whose expectations are based only on their own beliefs and very limited observations.*

11) A strong criticism comes from Sharwood Smith (1986), who questions the Comprehension Hypothesis. He argues that there are two ways of processing input, one involving comprehension only and the other acquisition. This means that acquisition occurs only when learners notice the gap in their understanding.

SK: *Of course, comprehension doesn't always lead to acquisition. It happens only when the input contains i+1. But there aren't "two ways of processing input." There is comprehension, which happens in only one way. Sometimes it leads to acquisition, and sometimes it doesn't. If the input has no new material that the person hasn't acquired (and is ready to acquire), there will of course be no acquisition.*

12) In what ways has the theory been modified in recent years?

SK: *The changes are additions and expansions. I can't think of any place in which any of the original hypotheses were wrong.*

(1) I added the "output filter" to deal with cases in which people do not perform as well as they could (Krashen, 1997). The output filter is most obvious in the case of pronunciation; I suggest that our accents in other languages are often "better" than we actually reveal in our speech. We don't always "perform our competence" because we feel uncomfortable doing so. The evidence includes the observation that our accents are variable; when we feel comfortable, our accent gets better.

(2) The hypotheses cover, or rather help explain, more areas, including literacy development (Krashen, 2004), bilingual education (Krashen, 1998), and possibly animal language (Krashen, 2009a). This is, of course, a sign that the theory is correct: It explains more areas than it was originally designed to explain. I agree with Ralph Waldo Emerson (as cited in Myerson, 2000): "The value of a principle is the number of things it will explain."

13) Why has the theory met so much resistance?

SK: *There are several reasons. The first is that new ideas often generate responses from the "loyal opposition." This is a healthy reaction and forces us to examine possible flaws and lacunae.*
A second is that this theory represented a new paradigm, which, if correct, would require a dramatic change for nearly all scholars working in the field (exceptions, of course, included those who had similar ideas before I did, such as Leonard Newmark, James Asher, S. Pit Corder, and Harris Winitz in second language acquisition, and Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith in literacy). This retooling is not easy to do.

Third are the financial implications. If the theory is right, the mutli-billion dollar world-wide textbook industry in language arts, ESL and foreign language teaching has to change.

Fourth: The theory covers a lot of ground and is supported by research results in several fields. I regard these fields as one, but it is clear that many scholars do not. The research includes studies from first language acquisition, second language acquisition, foreign language acquisition, literacy development, and bilingual education, and is published in a wide variety of professional publications. Most of my critics are not familiar with all of these different areas. The second language critics, for example, generally ignore or just don't know about the

evidence from free voluntary reading, which includes studies done with first and second language acquirers (Cho 2009/2010; Krashen, 2004, 2007b, 2010; Lee, 2007; Mason, 2009/2010), as well as research dealing with phonics (Krashen, 2009b), and phonemic awareness (Krashen, 2002). The literacy critics often have no idea that important evidence supporting the Comprehension Hypothesis exists in second language acquisition. And few in either of these fields are familiar with evidence from bilingual education (Crawford & Krashen, 2007) or library research (see e.g. the work of Keith Curry Lance and associates at http://www.rslresearch.com).

I sympathize: It's hard to keep up with everything.

Fifth, there is some disagreement on the way science works. Some critics want more detail than anyone could possibly provide, demanding a complete explanation of how the language acquisition device works. As Ellidokuzoglu (2008) notes, this is like demanding Newton provide an explanation of gravity in terms of gravitons. Also, others want "proof," which according to the way science works, is never possible. All science can do is present hypotheses and supporting evidence.

The sixth and, I think, the major reason: For a lot of people, the Comprehension Hypothesis runs against 'common sense' and may even clash with their sense of fair play. For these people, we learn everything through 'skill-building.' According to the skill-building view, we learn languages by first consciously learning the rules and vocabulary, we practice them again and again until they become 'automatic,' and eventually we can actually speak and understand the language. In other words, we have to work hard for a long time until we reap the benefits. The Comprehension Hypothesis says real language use begins right away; you can read and listen to interesting stories from the beginning, which is not hard work and quite pleasant, and grammar and vocabulary are acquired as a result of getting comprehensible input.

This requires a major shift in thinking, and I suspect that it bothers some people who think that gratification should not be instant but delayed, and accomplishment always requires a certain amount of suffering.

14) What is your overall evaluation of the theory?

SK: I think it's a good theory. 'Good' does not necessarily mean 'correct.' 'Good' means that in testing the hypotheses that make up the theory, we make progress.

4 Discussion

In this article, the criticisms against the Comprehension Hypothesis were presented and Krashen replied to all of them. To elaborate more on the topic, the major controversies surrounding the issues of simplicity, attention, comprehensible output and, finally, some recent modifications to the hypotheses will be discussed at length.

The first challenge to the theory was the notion that the Input Hypothesis is too simple to describe the complex process of language acquisition. Krashen argues that his theory is as simple as Einstein's formula e=mc2, and that there is nothing wrong with it. In support, one could quote Ellidokuzoğlu (2008) who writes: 'Despite the fact that comprehensible input hypothesis is not explanatory enough, it does not mean that the theory is deficient, since Newton also did not provide enough detail concerning how gravity takes place." (p. 2) No one knows the answer yet. Like Newton and gravity, in L2 acquisition, the Comprehensible Input Model seems plausible and is a basic element of language acquisition.

The second major challenge to the Input Hypothesis is that it neglects and rejects the role of attention in the process of language acquisition. As Schmidt (1990) claims, people learn about the things they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to. In his response,

Krashen made it clear that he still holds and supports the view that attention is not necessary (see the interview).

From a theoretical point of view, Truscott (2004) argues that the Noticing Hypothesis is not based on any consistent theory of language, and lacks a coherent linguistic base and a precise definition of language. For instance, some advocates of the Noticing Hypothesis consider "connectionism" as their theoretical basis, which is still a dull concept. He further adds that this drawback leads to vagueness which, in turn, defies the direct testing of the hypothesis.

From a practical point of view, Truscott (1998) deals with two versions of the Noticing Hypothesis, strong and weak. He doesn't delve into the weak version, since he believes it only considers general awareness which is a point of agreement for all and is merely the general attention to the task. He sharply criticizes the strong version which requires noticing as a necessary condition for acquisition to take place. First, he questions the concept of noticing. His big question is: Noticing of what aspect? Grammatical gap? Morphology? And what part of morphology? Affix? If so, they need a deep knowledge of the language system. Moreover, he claims that *attention* cannot be equated with *awareness* due to the fact that you pay attention to what you are doing but you are not consciously aware of what you must learn and sometimes you do not notice the gap which is lacking. Consequently, attention is helpful but not necessary.

In regard to research, he challenges the experimental evidence of the Noticing Hypothesis from Dawson and Schell (1987) on the grounds that these involved just a simple condition experiment, but when it comes to syntax that is too complicated, the same result is not plausible.

However, despite all of the shortcomings of the Noticing Hypothesis, it is hard to neglect its facilitative role in the process of language acquisition. It is true that it would be hard to notice the gap; still, when the gap is noticed, it can facilitate the process. As Schmidt (1993) points out, he is making an effort to demonstrate that learning is enhanced by attention rather than to demonstrate that learning cannot take place without it. Although it is an unshakable fact that we can learn a language implicitly, there are some studies which acknowledge the view that increased attention helps learning (e.g. Allport, Antonis, & Reynolds, 1972; Curran & Keele, 1993), but caution must be exercised to reach such an interpretation, for, depending on the nature of the task, the increased attention may not lead to a better performance (Cohen, Ivry, & Keele, 1990).

To reiterate another major point of controversy, it was mentioned that Krashen hypothesizes that learned knowledge cannot be converted to acquired knowledge, which is a "non-interface" position. Krashen (2003) only believes in the role of monitoring for explicitly learned knowledge, demanding the presence of all three conditions required for monitor use. He argues the best monitoring can be applied in witting when there is enough time available. He gave the example of a performer whose performance in writing was almost flawless and error-free, whereas in unmonitored situations, third person singulars were dropped off or the possessive markers were occasionally missed. However, as Gregg (1984) states, there some language learners who produce spontaneous and grammatically correct L2 utterances by being simply exposed to formal instruction, which may support the weak interface position of Ellis (2003). Krashen (1987), nonetheless, believes that this is because of developing parallel language abilities with the dominance of the acquired counterpart.

The last major controversy discussed here concerns the role of comprehensible output which was challenged by Krashen based on the argument of the scarcity of output. Krashen (1998) makes use of the scarcity argument, according to which output is too rare to be effective in the process of language acquisition (Krashen, 1994). He contends that the drawbacks of the Output Hypothesis are grounded in the rarity of output in the process of acquisition. He analyzed a study by Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki (1994). There were three groups in it, one premodified input, one modified input and one unmodified input group. The findings show that out of 42 learners in the interactional modified group, only seven were involved in meaning negotiation and others only listened (Krashen, 1998). Krashen takes this as a piece of evidence for the rarity of output and also mentions that even those who were involved in meaning negotiation did not make the kind of adjustments that the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis claims are necessary in acquisition (see Krashen, 1998). This claim is supported by other studies. Pica (1988) in his study states that the compre-

hensible output is relatively infrequent. Pica, Holliday, Lewis and Moregenhaller (1989) found that 6% of output produced is comprehensible. Van den Branden (1997) concludes that even in contrived situations meant to produce comprehensible output, it would be scarce. Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Pica (1988), in their studies, found that only one piece of comprehensible output is produced per hour, which lends support to the argument that comprehensible output is scarce.

In addition to of all of these controversies, the 'Output Filter,' a construct which has not been a point of debate to the present date, has been added to the theory and will be elaborated on here.

Krashen proposes an 'output filter.' He calls it a conjecture, since according to him "it is based on flimsy evidence that does not deserve the term hypothesis" (Krashen, 1997). He says, "My conjecture is that accurate pronunciation in a second language, even in adults, is acquired rapidly and very well. We simply do not use our best accent because we feel silly" Krashen (1997, p. 1). The output filter is an obstacle that prevents performers from fully realizing their competence. Yet, it is different from the affective filter in that it accounts for output, not input. He provides four arguments in support of his conjecture. The first one is variability. Variability means we are affected by the circumstances in which we are performing. If we feel we are evaluated, the output filter will be heightened, resulting in the deterioration of our accent. The second one is imitation of the dialects of our first language and foreign accent. Sometimes, we can imitate a dialect but in communicating with its native speakers, the output filter holds us back for the uneasy feeling that we experience. But, in jokes or plays, they are given a try and are more frequent. The third argument stems from the alcohol study (Guiria, Beit-Hallahmi, Brannon, Dull, & Scovel, 1972) which shows how alcohol can temporarily lower the filter, resulting in a better performance. Finally, the last piece of evidence stems from Stevick (1980), who describes one of his classes in which one student was strikingly better than the others. In the sessions in which the top student was absent, the second best student suddenly showed a dramatic improvement, caused by the lowering of the output filter.

5   Conclusion

Despite the harsh criticisms leveled against Krashen, his hypotheses have survived as they are subjects of controversy. Some scholars reject them; for instance, McLaughlin attacks Krashen's Monitor Model by arguing that "Krashen has not produced any evidence in support of his claims but has simply argued that certain phenomena can be viewed from the perspective of his theory" (McLaughlin, 1990, as cited in Mangubhai, 2003, p. 8). However, Krashen and his proponents strongly challenge the counterevidence, and mention that their claim is deeply rooted in the nature of L2 acquisition and supported by large quantity of data. In addition, they mention the fact that grammatical roles are too abstract and complex for teaching to be used in natural environments (Murphy & Hastings, 2006). They even reinterpret the data from their rival studies, and call them into question.

It seems that Krashen stoutly believes that the large body of research in the field supports the Input Hypothesis. For instance, he mentions that the weak version of the Interaction Hypothesis contributes majorly to the production of comprehensible input through interaction; therefore, it provides further support for the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1987).

Moreover, the prominent role of output was challenged by comparisons between production based and input based classes. The results indicated the superiority of input based language learners (Krashen, 2003, 2004, 2005; Lee, 2005; Pionnah, 2008). In addition, the opponents of explicit instruction, based on evidence from different studies, (see Krashen, 2003; Truscott, 1998) dispute the longitudinal effect of this teaching approach by demonstrating the loss of learned knowledge (that is not acquired) after a while. Moreover, although Norris & Ortega (2000) argue in favor of the long term effects of instruction, they even accept its gradual loss in the course of time: "Instructional effectiveness does seem to last beyond immediate observed effect, although it also gradually deteriorates.'' (p. 489) Krashen argues that in an interview with a group of teachers, some very experienced grammar teachers said that they take a look at complex rules before teaching them in class; thus, if teachers can forget the rules, let alone the learners who are expected to

use them in fluent communication (Krashen, 1998). Krashen also analyzed some of the studies which favored explicit instruction (for instance Shehadeh, 2002) and found out that the rules used were very easy; therefore, they were easy to apply and utilize in the monitoring process. Moreover, he rejects the effectiveness of explicit teaching in the acquisition process on the grounds that if it was supposed to work, it could change the natural order of acquired knowledge (Krashen, 1985).

No theory can be flawless and without deficiency. Although McLaughlin's (1990) argument that it is not possible to test the distinction between acquisition and learning seems reasonable, the Input Hypothesis has nevertheless made a great contribution to our understanding of second language learning and cast some light on the processes and difficulties that second language learners face.

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