

A Critical Evaluation of Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

The necessity and importance of learning more than one language is at apex in this globalized 21st century. This article studies American Educationist and Linguist Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language learning and teaching. This study critically analyses relevant empirical secondary and tertiary sources following qualitative data analysis method to investigate the answers of the research questions, viz. a) what are the effectiveness and appropriateness of Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language learning and teaching for Second Language learners of the globe? b) Whether or not to recommend Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language learning and teaching? This article finds that friendly, sympathetic and motivational teachers' Comprehensible Input by encouraging pleasure reading of self-chosen reading materials and listening dialogues, conversations of practical life scenario as well as watching movies in a less anxiety congenial atmosphere by attentive Second Language learners with standard alphabetical and vocabulary knowledge will make Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis a success in L2 learning and teaching.

Introduction

Multilingualism i.e., ability to communicate in more than one language has become a basic tenet in academia nowadays perceiving the necessity and importance of second language learning in linguistically diverged global village. To materialize effective language learning and teaching linguists and scholars have piloted, proposed and practiced multiple language learning and teaching methods and approaches in academia like Grammar Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task Based Language Teaching, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, Silent Method and Natural Approach. Regarding language learning and teaching, American Linguist and co-initiator of Natural Approach in language acquisition and learning Stephen Krashen proffers five hypotheses in language learning and teaching namely Natural Order Hypothesis, Learning Hypothesis, Affective Filter Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis and Input Hypothesis which play significant role in academia. Krashen has combined psychological underpinning of the learners with educational culture and linguistic approaches towards language learning and teaching. This article demystifies Krashen's Input Hypothesis as it has attracted attention of several stakeholders in academia like language learners, teachers, scholars and institutions. Though Krashen's Input Hypothesis has already been analyzed by researchers, this article discovers and evaluates the result and output of Krashen's Input Hypothesis which has not yet been researched adequately. Firstly, this paper provides definition and evaluation of language acquisition and learning. This article then examines Krashen's Input Hypothesis, comments on Comprehensible Input and analyses "Silent Period" and "i+1". The next part of this article analyses comprehensible reading input for writing output of language learners. Following this, this study juxtaposes listening and speaking skills of language learners in Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Finally, this article pinpoints the

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appropriateness and effectiveness of Krashen's Input Hypothesis in language learning and teaching.

Methodology

This article applied qualitative data analysis method. This study used secondary and tertiary data to evaluate Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language learning and teaching as well as to recommend Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Second Language learning and teaching. This paper used relevant research articles as secondary data and books, lectures, newspaper articles, YouTube videos etc as the tertiary data.

Aims and Objectives

This article focuses more on learning second language rather than teaching to fulfill the following aims and objectives:

1. In-depth critical evaluation of Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis with relevant empirical sources
2. Recommending Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis to Second Language Learning and Teaching

Acquisition and Learning

Acquisition and learning are two ways of language learning but the former one gets importance in Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1989a). In acquisition, Learners learn language while they are not conscious of the learning. Language acquirers learn mother language (L1) through language acquisition process. It is a natural process of language learning and acquirers are not aware of it. Grammar, meaning and structure of a language cannot be perceived by language acquirers at that time. The author argues that children's mistakes are corrected by their parents and elder ones. Actually, children initially accept the sound of a language and next time, they understand and internalize that sound in a meaningful linguistic expression. This very process of children's language acquisition is termed as "tacit competence" or a "feel" for language (Chomsky 28). Gradually, language acquirers begin producing sounds with meaning that is mother tongue or First Language (L1). On the contrary, language learning occur consciously following linguistic methods and approaches by adult learners in which Stephen Krashen's (1989) Input Hypothesis puts forward the idea of comprehensible input that is termed as "language learning by feeling" (445). Krashen observes that linguistic input should be apprehended and comprehended by conscious feeling process of learners. Whenever, a child starts talking natural sounds, parents talk with the child in different meaning ways. Such conversation between child and parents, to Krashen, is named comprehensible input which can also be applied for adult learners. It is also observed by Krashen that after getting birth, if a child is kept in isolation from such kind of comprehensible input, language learning will not be successful. In such a situation, Krashen (1982) focuses on that comprehensible input accelerates second language learning both for children and adult learners. In addition to comprehensible input, language learning and teaching environment plays note worthy role as stated by Krashen in his input hypothesis. Krashen confirms that learners' anxiety is one of the chief barriers of language learning and so, anxiety free second language learning environment is conducive to comprehensible input and thus, results more positively to second language learners. Second language learners and teachers should keep in mind that comprehensible input and anxiety cannot run side by side. In connection between comprehensible input and learners' anxiety, Krashen

suggests firmly, “Learners acquire language in one way and only one way when learners get comprehensible input in a low anxiety environment” (YouTube, 2010). It means that the ideas of anxiety in relation to language learning has not totally discarded by Krashen; rather he mentions that “low anxiety” is somewhat needed for effective second language learning and teaching. However, “high anxiety” from both side of learners and teachers makes language learners tensed, scared and stressed. As a result, linguistic input becomes incomprehensible and unfathomable by the learners. Such high anxiety circumstances result delayed linguistic production and in extreme cases, learners stop trying to learn second language. Finally, second language learning is hindered. Krashen linkage between comprehensible input and anxiety resembles to Chomsky's (1986) theory of Language Acquisition Device (LAD). For Chomsky (1986), human brain possesses a part named Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that works for cognition and understanding. High anxiety bars language input to LAD and so language learning and production becomes problematic. Let us move on to Krashen's theory on “Silent Period” and “i+1” relating to comprehensible input.

Comprehensible Input, Silent Period and “i+1”

For Krashen, Input Hypothesis addresses the answers of how does language acquisition occur effectively. Input Hypothesis is an important one among Krashen's five hypotheses because it determines the learning criteria of all four skills of a language. Krashen also gives emphasis on learning content of second language learning. It reads when a learner wants to learn a language, learning materials like reading and listening topics which Krashen terms ‘input’ should be easily understandable and recognizable. This kind of easily understandable reading and listening stuffs Krashen identifies as comprehensible input. In this regard, Krashen (1982) positions, “learners acquire language in just one way—by understanding messages or by obtaining Comprehensible Input” (98). The author of this article elaborates—for learning cooking, learner should first see practically how to cook; teaching about the combination of spices with cooking stuffs and teaching how gas burner works do not help cook. Rather, practical training through comprehensible input gets a cook prepared and next time, the cook begins trying i.e., production or result or output. Similar kind of comprehensible linguistic input lends a helping hand to second language learning and teaching.

In case of Input Hypothesis, second language learners actually “acquire language by understanding messages” (Krashen 48). In this regards, Krashen adds, “from *input* to *production* there is a period when Learners do not produce any original statements” (Abukhattala 128). Krashen terms this time period as “silent period”. For perceiving and internalising meaningful messages of comprehensible input, this silent period is required. Learners are highly likely to develop a negative or passive attitude for language learning if silent period breaks anyway. The researcher argues that Krashen's Input Hypothesis determines no fixed time frame of “silent period”. To Krashen, “silent period” may vary depending on learner to learner. For some learners, they produce result in a short time, just after getting comprehensible input in class. For others, they appear to take longer time or in some situation never produce desired output. Krashen argues that learners' cognitive level and academic environment play note-worthy role regarding “silent period”. To critique, measuring learners' level instantly becomes troublesome in certain circumstances. Here, Krashen recommends for a “finely tuned input” (Abukhattala 129) in less anxious academic environment. “Silent period” and comprehensible input are essentially related to environmental ingredient for second or target language acquisition.

Chomsky (1975) terms comprehensible input as in similar vein that reads comprehensible input as “a richly specified internal language acquisition device” (35).

Krashen observes that in daily conversation, learners normally operate all kinds of required structures for meaningful communication. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis recommends that language teacher should ask in simple sentence; answer using continuous tense; carry narratives using past simple; advice in conditional, etc. Teachers should determine the linguistic teaching content they utilize for teaching in language class. To Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, learners should unmask to a refined linguistic input; if structures, comments, conditionals utilize in language class perceived genuinely by learners, result comes rightly. Krashen suggests, “the optimal input must be comprehensible, interesting and/or relevant, not grammatically sequenced, sufficient in quality, and a little bit beyond the learners’ level of comprehension: $i + 1$ ” (Cited in Abukhattala 129). Here, ‘i’ refers to student’s current cognitive level of proficiency while ‘1’ puts for inputting meagerly above ‘i’ level. If a learner proceeds from ‘i’ towards ‘i+1’, he or she attains the result of comprehensible input. Language Teachers’ usages of pictures, gestures, charts, maps, recycling vocabulary can usher input comprehensible in second language class through ‘i+1’ of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis.

Reading Versus Writing

Krashen’s Input Hypothesis states that reading becomes input for writing skill of a language. In order to apprehend the usages of structures and conditionals for writing, reading works significantly as a linguistic input. Regarding this, Schutz (2007) puts forward that “*Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill*” (22). *Reading projects Krashen’s comprehensible input. Reading helps to Internalise the linguistic comprehensible input through which language acquisition happens effectively. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis signifies, “that more Comprehensible Input, aural and written, results in more language acquisition”* (Barnes 16). In similar tune, Carol Chomsky (1972) confirms the idea of “competence and performance” (17). The researcher argues that reading more books relating to linguistic materials accelerates language acquisition effectively. For reading habit of learners, Chomsky (1972) finds, “those Acquirers who grew up in richer print environments displayed more grammatical competence” (11). *The author observes in language classroom that learners state vocabulary as main problem of second language learning. For solving this problem, teachers in language class put focus on monotonous drill to memorise new words, grammatical rules, conditionals and structures of target second language. This process of second language learning is lengthy and time consuming. In such a juncture, Krashen’s input hypothesis through reading forms multidimensional approach of picking up vocabulary, conditionals, grammatical rules and sentence structures. Rice (1897), in this arena, reports that “adults who said they spent more time doing leisure reading scored higher on a vocabulary test”* (17).

Thus, practicing pleasure reading like story books, interesting text books, fictions, travelogues expedite the knowledge of vocabulary, conditionals, grammatical rules and sentence structures of target second language. No repetitious drill; no tests threat; nothing is in pleasure reading that can forge a learner harassed, nervous and stressed. Krashen’s reading input explains that a particular kind of reading helps more to learners than other category of reading which learners pick from their personal liking and reads it prior to sleep. Learners’ desired reading which they select intentionally is categorised by Krashen as “free voluntary reading or reading for pleasure” (YouTube, 2015). Such kind

of voluntary reading proffers powerful tool for learning all kinds of second languages or target languages. Krashen states,

Free Voluntary Reading is a source of reading ability; writing ability; ability to write respectable prose; the ability to handle complex grammatical constructions; a lot of vocabulary; all of over educated vocabulary just about from reading; most of our ability to spell. All these come from reading—the powerful form of Comprehensible Input (YouTube, 2015).

It reads that in multiple language learning scenarios, learners begin from grammar; then vocabulary in drills and so on. Krashen (1989) explains it as “Skill Building Hypothesis” that is contrary to comprehensible input hypothesis. It is mentioned previously in this article that such kind of skill building process need long time for learning second language. Skill building concerns “individual rules or items, and gradually, through drills and exercises, makes these automatic” (Krashen 441). So, Krashen terms skill building approach for language learning as “delayed gratification” (YouTube, 2015). For Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis, language learners get immediate output. Reading good books with interesting story speed up language acquisition. Thus, compelling or interesting reading plays significant role in language cognition. For reading input, Krashen states that “the more you enjoy it, the better your acquisition will be” (YouTube, 2015). In such way, pleasure reading is entertaining and thus it earns enjoyment and happiness. Skill building is repetitive, monotonous, time-consuming, boring, dull and painful. Krashen mentions the growing attitude of virtual reading, like blogs, face book and twitter which count too for comprehensible reading input in some way. Hence, reading offers effective and appropriate comprehensible input to receive, internalise and produce grammar, spelling and structure of target language altogether that result writing output of second language. Let us move on to listening as a comprehensible input for speaking skill of target language.

Listening Versus Speaking

To Krashen's Input Hypothesis, speaking skill of a language gets comprehensible input through listening the linguistic content of target second language. Pronunciation, stressed and intonation patterns, tone and style of target second language are perceived and internalised by listening and this type of linguistic inputs result correct speaking output of target second language. For communication, listening constructs oral communication ability of second language learners. Oral communication in target language depends largely on adequate volume of vocabulary, pronunciation and accent patterns of second language which are nicely picked up and understood through listening. Reading does not help learners to recognise the tone and stylistic linguistic patterns of second language. Attending lectures, speeches, dialogues and conversation as well as watching movies, cartoons and news in target language help second language learners to perceive the tone, accent, pronunciation, stress, intonation, etiquette and manner which successively enlarge the cognitive level of second language learners. In case of formal situations and in cartoons and movies, standard linguistic patterns of a language are displayed. So, all these basic tenets of target language can be input properly by listening. Krashen (1989) confirms, “More Comprehensible Input in the form of listening is also associated with better vocabulary development” (443). Thus speaking skill as well as the standard pronunciation and vocabulary of target language are achieved by listening. It is observed that language learners firstly picks sounds of language with the knowledge of alphabet and grammar; gradually internalise the sound and after passing Krashen's “silent period” in hazardless environment, start producing the sound of that target language. Same

situation is prescribed by Krashen's listening input hypothesis for second language acquisition. So, listening stories in standard language; watching good movies and news in target language; attending dialogue and conversation help speaking output. Wells (1986) finds, "students who heard more stories during their pre-school years are judged by their teachers to have better vocabularies at age ten" (19). Passing few moments in target language area becomes beneficial in this regard. Swain and Lapkin (1998) declare, "dialogue serves as a tool both for L2 learning and communication" (320). There is an analogy—one learner gets himself admitted in language teaching institute, while other one visits Chinese Embassy restaurant for learning Chinese language. Second learner listens regularly to Chinese speaking people and tries to talk a bit in target language. After few months, the second one makes improvement in Chinese speaking skill. Here, Krashen puts forward a "narrow listening" that reads listening in interest and in less anxiety friendly environment. So, listening becomes important linguistic input for getting speaking output of target language.

Critical Evaluation

The author of this article observes his own language learning scenarios in the patterns of starting from alphabet, then vocabulary, then grammar and structure of target language. A same criterion is followed for learning both first and second language. Next time, teachers in language classes introduce high frequency vocabulary of target language by translating text in mother tongue. Author himself follows same technique for language learning. The author encourages second language learners to read a lot and listen more from target language in practical situation. The researcher argues and opines that Krashen's "voluntary or pleasure reading" and listening input require a minimum and moderate knowledge of alphabet and vocabulary of target language. In all languages, four skills—reading, listening, writing and speaking are important. For Krashen, reading works as the input for writing and listening puts forward for speaking. Learning a language means that a language user will be capable in these four skills. Apart from these, academic writing, writing for general purposes, formal and informal usages of language are the various other fields of communication. Krashen's "free voluntary reading or pleasure reading" might help learners' writing ability regarding general purposes. Author thinks that methodologies and pedagogies of language learning and teaching are also concerned with Krashen's Input Hypothesis. The researcher wonders that in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, when the learner will study alphabet is not clearly mentioned. In addition, minimum vocabulary is required even to conduct Krashen's "voluntary or pleasure reading". The author notes, for example, that a Bengali speaking learner fails to learn French, if he or she does not recognise letters or words of French language. Again, children learn mother tongue within one to two years of their age which is called "silent period" by Krashen. The author concerns about the time length of adult's "silent period". So, the author is not totally assertive for the result of Krashen's comprehensible input through reading and listening. For a practical example, author of this article watches Hindi movies and thus, understands Hindi language well (Input Hypothesis) but cannot write and speak Hindi till date; cannot read Hindi for the lack of Hindi alphabetic knowledge. Hence, the author mentions that alphabetic idea and knowledge on vocabulary should be added with Krashen's Input Hypothesis to have output for language learners. For Krashen (2010):

People all around the globe eat a food item, chew it; swallow it and get it to stomach and digest the food that makes him or her healthy—this is same for all people of the world. Language acquisition is the same for all of the learners. If the food becomes tasteless; if

the food item is not good; if the cook is not efficient; if the invitees are not hungry; if the environment is dirty, result will not be healthy.

Finally, researchers should pilot Krashen's Input Hypothesis to employ it in second language acquisition and learning.

Conclusion and Recommendation

To conclude, it is obvious that Krashen's Input Hypothesis occupies a noteworthy place in second language acquisition theories, methods and approaches at hand. Krashen's reading and listening input accelerates language learners' cognitive level. Interesting reading and listening in a stress-free situation attracts the human brain and so, produces a better replica of target language in a positive way. Thus, Krashen's Input Hypothesis requires the best type of linguistic input. If funny input is delivered in a funny way, learners laugh but forget quickly. Actually, learners catch up the story of linguistic content conveyed before them. Aesop's fables are good examples in this regard which carry both morality and entertainment. Learners' interest is also a vital tool too in second language learning. Krashen advocates for learners' motivation to have interested second language learners. Krashen (2010) anecdotes that a bilingual or multilingual person enjoys his or her life and by learning multiple languages, learners can get the better control of his or her age. Hence, learners' anxiety bars smooth language learning. Test and examination cause of anxiety to learners. Here, practical language test like go shopping in second language environment is appreciated to eradicate test-related anxiety. Therefore, comprehensible input by motivational and sympathetic teachers in a less anxious atmosphere to attentive second language learners will put together Krashen's Input Hypothesis effective and successful in second or target language learning and teaching.

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