

The Krashen's Input Hypothesis Education Essay



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Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis seeks to explain how individuals acquire language, and how this understanding of language acquisition applies to second language learners (1982, p. 20). Krashen states the input hypothesis stresses "meaning first" in language learning. On teaching a second language, the input hypothesis compares how individuals learn their first language to suggest how teachers should interact with students trying to learn their second language. Considering Krashen's input hypothesis and its critics; this paper will explore some ways to apply the input hypothesis in the classroom.

Krashen's input hypothesis consists of four parts. The first part distinguishes between meaning and form and acquisition and learning (1982, p. 21). Since language learners need to communicate to function in society, language learners will try to listen to understand meaning and will later gain the proper form from guided input. Krashen explains the input hypothesis as a progression through stages. The language learner, by trying to understand the meaning in a communicative utterance, advances through these stages when the communicative utterances are slightly more complicated than the learner's current stage of understanding.

The second part of the input hypothesis concerns how it is that language learners can try to understand slightly more in meaning than they have currently learned. Krashen claims that by using the information that exists in the world around them, an individual can associate the correct meaning to a communicative utterance. In other words, levels of advancement in language acquisition occur through gradually gaining greater levels of meaning from the input they receive. The input (i) plus the number of the level (#) explains

the relationship between the input and the use of what Krashen calls “extralinguistic information” to create $(i + 1)$ (1982, p. 22).

Krashen recognises that knowing what is the suitable amount of input to produce $(i + 1)$ is difficult, if not impossible to decide. This brings about the third part of the input hypothesis, which states, “When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, $i + 1$ will be provided automatically” (1982, p. 22). While children do not learn language by lessons of form that follow what Krashen calls a “syllabus” or “structure of the day,” typically the opposite occurs in the classroom (1982, p. 22). In a second language classroom setting, teachers often use textbooks that follow a set structure. Teachers who must test a student’s knowledge of a language are often required to follow a structure in their classroom to evaluate any benchmarks set for their classroom. In a given classroom, one student might find the course material determined in advance by the teacher to be too easy, while for another student the level might be fitting for them to learn new material. Another student might have fallen behind in the course material covered and therefore has difficulty in catching up with the rest of the class.

Krashen’s fourth part concerns fluency achieved by the language learner after experiencing progression through suitable $(i + 1)$ levels. Aids from the environment help an individual in assessing the meaning in a given communicative act. The more communication that connects to real life situations, the more likely an individual will succeed in eventually achieving some fluency in their target language.

Krashen supports the input hypothesis with evidence from both first and second language acquisition. When a child learns a first language, they learn from what Krashen refers to as “ caretaker speech.” When a caretaker aids a child in learning a first language, they do not follow a structure as a teacher in a classroom setting. But this is not to suggest a free-for-all in language learner support by the caretaker. To ensure that a child and adult can communicate with one another, the adult changes the way they speak to the child (simplification of form, carefully selecting diction). Many caretakers would not communicate in the same way with a child as they would with an adult. This does not mean that how a child and a caretaker interact in language learning support doesn’t change in time. Krashen (1982) writes, “ Caretaker speech is not precisely adjusted to the level of each child, but tends to get more complex as the child progresses” (p. 22). In addition, Krashen argues that, when examining first language support, caretakers cover topics about what occurs in the present rather than in the future. Topics about the present help the learner understand meaning through the lens of not only language, but also the world around them (Krashen, 1982, p. 23).

Krashen also argues that second acquisition (SLA) supports the input hypothesis (1982, p. 24). SLA provides three areas of evidence for the input hypothesis in “ simple codes”. Krashen claims that just because the language learner is an adult, does not mean the target (acquisition) is different from a child (Krashen, 1980). Secondly, Krashen states that $(i + 1)$ can be used for both FLA and SLA. For the third support of the input hypothesis in SLA, the input itself is examined. Krashen believes that much

like interactions in FLA with caretakers, second language learners experience certain interactions with their teachers, with native speakers of the target language, and their classmates (1982, p. 24).

Yet another proof Krashen uses for the input hypothesis in second language acquisition is the “ silent period” (p. 26). This silent period refers to minimal speaking when learning a second language. The individual eventually does speak after some knowledge in the language has been acquired and the individual feels comfortable to speak the target language. But not everyone is allowed a silent period. Krashen (1982) writes, “ Adults, and children in formal language classes, are usually not allowed a silent period. They are often asked to produce very early in a second language, before they have acquired enough syntactic competence to express their ideas” (p. 27).

Finally, Krashen mentions the impact of a language learner’s first language on their second language. A specific language feature (such as sentence order) may be different in the learner’s first language and their target language. A learner might not have a grasp of their target languages’ features, resulting in the learner mixing rules from the first language to the second. A learner may face communication problems with a speaker of their target language because of rules from the learner’s first language that do not fit into the structure of the target language (Krashen, 1982, pp. 28-29).

Krashen’s input hypothesis has not gone without criticism (Mason, 2002). Criticisms of the input hypothesis include the conflict between caretaker speech and extralinguistic information, and the degree of input and degree of output that should be used between teacher and student in a second

language setting. Mason (2002) addresses the conflict between caretaker speech and extralinguistic information as a matter of what must be altered for a language learner in order to acquire language. Forming caretaker speech requires a change in input. Allowing for extralinguistic information to aid in language learning requires a change in environment (pp. 2-3). Mason identifies two major problems when relying on a change in input. The first concerns sociological factors (whether consistency exists across cultures and economic conditions and whether changing the input produces the kind of positive results Krashen claims it does). In other words, how a caretaker interacts with a child in one culture for language support may differ in another culture. Also, changing input (such as a language learner and native speaker interaction) could be counterproductive (cementing a rule in the learner's mind because of the change the native speaker makes to communicate with the language learner (Mason, 2002, p. 3). The second concerns extralinguistic information. Mason writes,

“ The second interpretation, modifying the context, may lead to the learner getting such rich extralinguistic clues that she does not have to bother to master the language. The learner gets by-by behaving as if they have understood the language, whereas in fact they have read the environment” (2002, pp. 3-4).

For example, an instructor asking questions to a large group of learners with multimedia (video, pictures, music), may receive output from many learners. Some of these learners, however, may piggyback their responses on other learners in the group. Especially with a large group, the teacher may be

unable to identify which students responded to the question in full, which did not.

Another conflict in Krashen's input hypothesis that Mason discusses relates to input and output. Mason (2002) argues that Krashen places a greater emphasis on input and what kind of input should occur than he does on what kind of output would occur. Too much emphasis on input can be counterproductive for the teacher, because the teacher cannot know a student's language ability without first allowing the student to speak. Mason also argues the teacher should provide some correction to the learner's speech. Krashen (1982) states that too much correction can hinder eventual output, but Mason (2002) believes that without correction a learner may make certain mistakes continuously. He writes, " It is only through the student's production that we can check whether she has fully understood the input or not, and that without this verification, there are a number of errors, particularly ' avoidance' errors, that are never cleared up" (Mason, 2002, p. 7).

For its application in the classroom, Krashen's input hypothesis provides some insight into the teacher-student relationship. More often than not, each student learning a second language will have a different level of acquisition than another student in the classroom. Some students might have an easier time reading and writing than speaking, while other students might have an easier time speaking and struggle with reading and writing. Also, every student will learn differently. Some students may benefit from a conversation-based curriculum, while other students may benefit from a curriculum based on rote memorization.

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Krashen's input hypothesis tries to address how instructors can communicate with students while using the environment around them to direct their instruction. For example, a teacher could use various multimedia to enforce the input to students. Using multimedia is one way to work with various individuals learning styles. Multimedia use, combined with teacher-talk, can allow students access to the course material while keeping the student's interest. Ideally, however, modified input in the form of teacher-talk would work best in a small group setting. The larger the group the teacher must address, the more likely a wider variation in student acquisition. Even within a small group some variation will occur, which is unavoidable. Some modification of teacher-talk would include speed, diction choice, and content. These three items could be controlled for student input, while teaching direct grammatical forms is avoided. As students become more comfortable with this approach, the teacher can increase speed while also including a wider vocabulary after the vocabulary has been reinforced through multimedia accompanying a lesson.

Addressing the choice of content can cause the greater difficulty for a teacher. Most language textbooks follow a progression of teaching greetings, directions, shopping, appointments, weather and other day-to-day topics. If the student lives in the community where they will speak the target language, the topics above could prove practical because the learner must use these topics in most social situations. For those students who learn their second language outside the community of their target language, these day-to-day topics may not apply to Krashen's mention of the "here and now" principle. Teachers may then encourage students to form study groups and

conversation practice times where they can speak the target language as if they were in the target language country. If this is the case, the teacher should sometimes attend to provide some input to students so the topics they discuss have practical, daily application.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for the teacher would involve providing regular lessons that help guide students without overtly teaching form. Conversation-based instruction often takes on this style if the school does not want a native speaker to use a textbook. But how does the teacher know how to direct students without some syllabus, even if that syllabus is an artificial progression through stages of language learning? A danger in removing an artificial syllabus would be keeping track, as an instructor, of the difficulty of material presented to the students. Just how much review is suitable? Should the instructor vary review material to include adjustment to speed and diction use?

For practicality in the classroom, it seems the input hypothesis works best for small groups or with an individual. Working with an individual or small group allows the instructor to check the student's progress so "teacher talk" can change to fit a student's progression through $(i + 1)$ stages. In addition, Krashen's suggestion of the "here and now" principle can work not only for the acquirer in the target language community, but also through study groups that include guided input from the instructor. As Krashen (1982) stresses, guided input accompanied by contextual elements from the environment (such as use in the target language community or multimedia in the classroom) can guide acquirers through $(i + 1)$ stages. Though Krashen's input hypothesis does not specify what teachers must present

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their students at specific stages, the hypothesis can help guide an instructor in designing a second language course that guides students through the process of language acquisition.

(2200 WORDS)

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PART B: QUESTIONS 1, 2, 4

How can knowledge of cognitive or learning styles of individual learners help a classroom teacher be more effective in class? (QUESTION #1)

Every language learner enters the classroom with his or her own unique perspectives, needs, and reasons for learning a particular language. This requires the teacher to understand and use the many approaches available in second language acquisition research to address individual learning styles. A teacher's knowledge of learning styles can aid the student in finding what methods work best to develop their language skills. This paper will discuss how educators can apply the knowledge of individual learning styles in the classroom, drawing on theories presented by Robinson (2001) and learning style preferences reviewed by Cohen (2003).

Robinson (2001) argues that individual difference (or ID) research and the Aptitude Complex/Ability Differentiation Hypothesis, and the Fundamental Difference/Fundamental Similarity Hypothesis help explain how individuals approach learning their target language (pp. 381-382). Robinson (2001) makes four main distinctions from these theories. The first concerns a learning style difference between an adult and a child. He writes, "There are child-adult differences in language learning; adults rely heavily on general problem-solving abilities and exhibit much greater variation in levels of attainment" (Robinson, 2001, p. 386). Robinson claims that differences

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between an adult and a child, as well as differences in aptitude, can help explain differences in learning styles.

Considering the perspective of the language learner, Cohen (2003) discusses various styles of language learners. Cohen defines learning styles as “general approaches to language learning” that include approaches to class instruction (auditory, visual, and tactile), one’s way of thinking, and one’s personality (2003, pp. 279-280). Cohen places learning style preferences into two groups. The first group includes “visual/auditory, abstract-intuitive, global, synthesizing, impulsive, open and extroverted” (2003, p. 282). The second group includes “hands-on, concrete-sequential, particular, analyzing, reflective, closure oriented and introverted” (2003, p. 282). Cohen goes on to state the result of what an individual learns depends their unique learning style preferences.

So, how can a teacher benefit from the knowledge of individual learning style preferences? Gardner (1983) identifies eight intelligences that help identify the types of learners teachers face in the classroom. These intelligences expand on other learning style theories that suggest preferences towards reading, writing or speaking to include inter- and intra-personal intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Gardner suggests that knowledge of one’s self and the people around them provides insight into the individual. In terms of learning styles, inter- and intra-personal intelligences impact how a student interacts with classmates and with the teacher. Knowledge of how one’s self learns successfully (for example, knowing what one’s learning styles are) can help guide the learner in terms of self-study. Knowledge of how those people around them make decisions impact social dynamics that influence group

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projects, classroom discussions and even teacher access (for additional learning support).

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences also has strong consequences for the teacher. Teachers should seek out ways to blend learning styles so that many different learners have access to the target lesson. Not only should teachers try to incorporate multimedia such as pictures, video, and music to address varying learning styles in the classroom, but also take into consideration how well the students might handle group work versus self-study, class discussion versus lecture, game-based instruction versus worksheet activities. Whereas some students might enjoy group work, self-study may be more helpful for eventual test score results. On the other hand, group work may encourage creative work out of some students while also building team cooperation that helps in the social development of students.

With the knowledge of learning styles and the multiple intelligences found among different learners, is how culture influences what learning styles are most effective for a particular group of students. Students who see rote memorization as the most effective way to improve test score results may view game-based or other group activities as a waste of time. Even if those students would, in theory, benefit from group work, they might reject group work on principle depending on what form learning styles tend to take in their culture.

The consideration of differing learning styles challenges teachers to provide students with more innovative ways of interaction with course materials. In

every classroom, different students will be more receptive to a particular learning style than another. An effective lesson in one classroom may flop in another if the teacher is not sensitive to the varying learning styles of his or her own students.

(726 WORDS)

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To which learning strategies would you try to expose your students? Why?

(QUESTION #2)

Through the study and application of learning strategies, teachers can help language learners achieve their second language goals. Though researchers differ in how they define learning strategies (see Chamot, 2005; Seliger, 1984; Tarone, 1980b), researchers do agree that knowledge and application of learning strategies help students learn their target language and educators know how to present their curriculum to the student. This paper will discuss which language strategies could prove most helpful in the classroom, and why those language strategies help achieve certain classroom goals.

Ellis (1994) identifies a learner's individual preferences and situational factors as two primary determinants of applying learning strategies (p. 529). Ellis (1994), citing Tarone (1980b), further examines three variations of learning strategies. The three kinds of strategies are production, communication, and learning (Ellis, 1994, p. 530). Ellis (1994) breaks down the third variation, learning strategies, into two parts, "The former, as defined by Tarone, are concerned with the learners' attempts to master new linguistic and sociolinguistic information about the target language. The latter are concerned with the learners' attempts to become skilled listeners, speakers, and readers, or writers" (p. 530).

I teach 600 Korean high school students each week in 50-minute periods. Though these students are divided by gender, they are not divided by level. These students have studied English by rote memorization for more than 10 years in school. Most students attend private academies to improve their test scores. There are three main types of students. The first group wants to study English and is open to applying many different learning strategies to

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improve their English. The second group is not interested in English, and is receptive to only a few learning strategies. The third group consists of those who only wish to improve English for the national university entrance examination. The third group prefers learning by rote memorization, while the second group works best in group settings. With group one any number of strategies could help their learning. These three groups classify most students. In every class, students from each group are present. So how does a teacher employ learning strategies that can help variation among students?

Cohen (1998) discusses strategies on communication, called "use strategies." As a conversation-based language instructor, these communication-based strategies I find most useful for my classroom. Cohen (as cited in Oxford, 2003) notes four learning use strategy types: using previously learned knowledge, methods of practicing output, preclass preparation, and output use a when the language has not yet been acquired (p. 275). Using a students' prior knowledge of English proves vital in the classroom. As a teacher I should try to access my student's collected knowledge from over ten years of vocabulary memorization. Showing a video clip that suits the lesson and then asking students to describe what they saw in the video helps students recall previously memorized course material. This method relates to Cohen's "imagery" (1987). To make this strategy more effective, I find video clips that do not include any speaking in English or Korean. The students have no choice but to use the knowledge of English learned in prior years to explain to me what they watched.

Cohen's second use strategy concerns providing the learner with helpful means to practicing output. Whereas some teachers prefer to follow a syllabus that covers certain grammatical concepts throughout the semester, I do not. At the beginning of each class I begin by asking students basic questions about school events, food, or weather. Some students do not speak at this time, while others are enthusiastic. To assess the output of the quiet students, I ask questions that require the students who may not know how to respond in English to use body gestures. Students use what Cohen (1987) refers to as "directed physical response." This is often an effective method because, once students have performed the physical gesture, they can recall enough to produce output to explain their response.

Also considering the use of learning strategies with the three groups of students I have mentioned above, gender and age also shape which learning strategies work best in my classroom. Because my classes are divided by gender, the strategies I employ for male students differ from strategies I use with female students. For example, my female students tend to benefit best from a mix of reading, writing, and speaking activities. The combination of different activities in reading, writing, and speaking tends to produce better recall later than only using speaking activities. With the male students, however, using only speaking activities tends to produce the best recall. Reading and writing activities with male students often reduce motivation unless some reward system is in place that encourages competition among the male students.

In my classroom, learning strategies that promote practice of communication that reinforces existing knowledge and uses competition tends to work best

for male students. Learning strategies that practice communication and introduce new material (especially when combined with multiple types of activities such as reading and writing) work best for female students. Knowledge of the student's end goal for language learning combined with adjusting methods within those groups (depending on class size or gender), helps promote effective classroom learning strategies. (856 WORDS)

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Is motivation the best answer for explaining the success or failure of second language learning? (QUESTION #4)

A major challenge for teachers and researchers in the study of second language acquisition is the extent that motivation plays into the learning

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process. Even more challenging is finding how to measure a learner's motivation. If motivation can be measured, can the findings help teachers motivate students in the classroom? This paper will explore how, and to what extent, motivation influences successful or unsuccessful language acquisition, exploring the recent research in motivation and second language learning (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Dornyei & Otto, 1998; Dornyei, 2001).

Csizer & Dornyei (2005) explore the relationship between motivation and learning, and suggest methods of motivation in the classroom using a method of analysis called "structural equation modeling." Structural equation modeling, or SEM, allows researchers to evaluate multiple items in a single theory. The authors state, "The technique is appropriate for testing "grand" theories, that is, comprehensive models made up of complex, interrelated variables, which is exactly the case with most factors involved in explaining issues in L2 acquisition" (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005, p. 19). In their research, they identify two issues of learner behaviour: language choice and amount of work invested in language study (p. 20).

Csizer and Dornyei (2005) claim that deciding one's second language reflects the culture they choose to connect themselves to. An individual's interest in the particulars of a certain culture and the interest in becoming a member of the target language community, suggests that an individual will be motivated to work towards learning the target language. As well as interest, the ability to use the language for a given purpose (fulfilling some want or completing some task) promotes motivation in language learning (Gardner, 2001, as cited in Csizer and Dornyei, 2005). The authors assert that interest and want fulfilment help create what they term "the Ideal L2

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Self." This "Ideal L2 Self" could explain why an individual who admires a particular culture studies the language of a culture even if the individual has never personally experienced that culture. Their "Ideal L2 Self" motivates them so one day their interest in the target culture can be realized. Csizer & Dornyei's terminology differs from Gardner (2001), who used described, "integrativeness," which is similar to "interest" mentioned above. Csizer and Dornyei (2005) write, "Integrativeness seen as the Ideal L2 Self can be used to explain the motivational set-up in diverse learning contexts, even if they offer little or no contact with L2 speakers" (p. 30).

Does Csizer and Dornyei's "Ideal L2 Self" help explain success and failure in second language learning? What is not clear is when a language learner develops the Ideal L2 Self. Does an individual, for example one that wants to travel abroad, create a Ideal L2 Self that they constantly strive for to obtain their goal of studying abroad? If this is the case, how does the individual remain motivated (especially in cases where years of study are required to obtain the goal)? How can motivation in the short-term be explained?

Perhaps individuals who aim for intensive study to achieve their Ideal L2 Self have, besides interest and want fulfilment, a felt need to acquire a second language. Without a felt need, such as short-term academic achievement, contractual obligation, or some other immediate need that should be addressed, it is possible an Ideal L2 Self may never be fully realized. Even if an instructor tries to motivate their students, if the student does not feel a felt need that fulfils short-term goals, it may be impossible to motivate students in a way that promotes la