



# THE MONITOR MODEL: AN ANALYTICAL INQUIRY INTO ITS ROLE IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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The monitor model in SLA distinguishes between language learning and language acquisition as acquisition is natural and subconscious while learning is conscious knowledge of the rules of the language. Comprehensible input and low level of affective filter ensure language acquisition. Competence acquired through acquisition is the tacit knowledge of the language system whereas competence acquired through learning acts as a monitor or editor of language use. The monitor model also explains the role of cognitive and metacognitive factors that impact second language learning and their implications for language teaching and learning in SLA context.

**Keywords**

SLA, ESL, EFL, learning, acquisition, hypothesis, monitor, affective-filter, cognitive, metacognitive, metalinguistic, tacit, morpheme, predictable, lateralization, input.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The cognitive factors that underlie the process of second language acquisition have always been at the center of discussions and debate in SLA. Though many linguists and researchers have approached the phenomenon of SLA in diverse ways, Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model, with its five hypotheses, brought about a breakthrough in the field of SLA. These hypotheses provide a comprehensive account of the cognitive process involved, the environmental factors that influence acquisition and learning, and the language instructional approach to attain optimal output in SLA. The theoretical construct of the Monitor Model of Second Language Acquisition comprises the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order

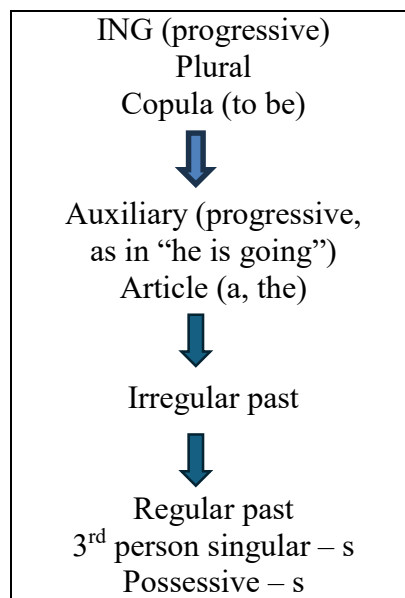
hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. An in-depth analysis of these hypotheses informs us of the complexities underlying SLA. This write-up uses the acronym SLA without distinguishing between ESL and EFL; rather, the acronym has been used to denote the learning and acquisition of a second language.

### **The acquisition-learning hypothesis**

The acquisition-learning hypothesis differentiates between acquisition and learning in L2 as “acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but only aware of the fact that they are using language for communication” (Krashen 2009, p. 10). while learning is a process that provides conscious knowledge of the correctness of second language use and enables the learner to explicate the learned rules in metalinguistic terms. It also states that adult learners may attain competence in a second language either through acquisition or through conscious learning, and the competence gained through acquisition is tacit and subconscious, while that of learning is conscious knowledge of the grammar of the target language. The hypothesis also states that language acquisition does not halt with the attainment of puberty and brain lateralization, as maintained by Lennenberg (1967); rather, even adults can acquire language competence similar to that of native speakers (Krashen 2009). Lennenberg maintains that automatic acquisition of L2 almost seems to disappear and “foreign language accent cannot be overcome easily after puberty” due to the lateralization of language-related functions to the left hemisphere of the brain (Lennenberg 1967, p. 176). This accounts for the differences in child-adult language acquisition. However, Krashen (2002) asserts that though puberty is a turning point in language acquisition, it is not evident whether cerebral dominance is directly related to language acquisition, and it is not established beyond doubt that brain dominance is complete at puberty, as evidence is available that brain lateralization is ‘firmly established’ much earlier, around the age of five, and that preconditions for brain lateralization exist even at birth. Likewise, the hypothesis holds that “error correction helps the learner to induce or figure out the right form of a rule” (Krashen 2009, p. 11) in conscious *learning*, but it does not aid *acquisition*, as in the case of parental correction of errors of child language that does not impact much on the acquisition (Brown, Cazden, and Bellugi 1973, cited in Krashen 2009).

### **The natural order hypothesis**

The natural order hypothesis states “that the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order” (Krashen 2009, p. 12). Originally postulated by Brown, the hypothesis asserts that children acquiring their L1 follow a certain pattern of acquisition that is predictable with ‘statistically significant similarities’ (Brown 1973, cited in Krashen 2009). Dulay and Burt extended the hypothesis to SLA and carried out a few sequential studies, which reported that though there were noticeable dissimilarities in the order in which the subjects of different age groups acquired the morphemes of the target language, their ‘global rank order of the functors’ was very similar among all the participants irrespective of their L1 (Dulay and Burt, 1974, 1975, cited in Krashen 2009).



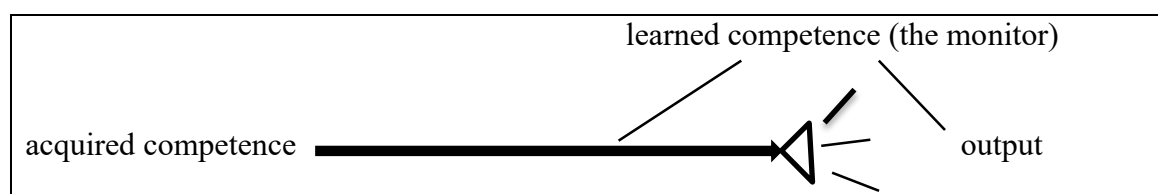
Average order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for English as a second language (children and adults) Krashen 2009, p.13

Krashen subscribes to their view that stated, "... children acquiring English as a second language also show a natural order for grammatical morphemes, regardless of their first language... different groups of second language acquirers showed striking similarities" (Krashen, 2009, p. 12). Krashen et al. (1974), as cited in Krashen 2009, conducted another study that corroborated the findings of Dulay and Burt's studies. The researchers studied a group of Spanish and non-Spanish adults using BSM and compared their findings to those of Dulay and Burt in 1973 and 1974. Their studies revealed that the non-Spanish adults exhibited a pattern of morpheme acquisition similar to that of the subjects in the studies of Dulay and Burt, particularly in the acquisition of the progressive -s, articles, and third-person singular -s, whereas the native Spanish speakers exhibited a higher level of accuracy in the acquisition of articles than that of the progressive -s. A similar study based on language skills, except speaking, was conducted by Larsen-Freeman (1975), which reported that the subjects of the study exhibited the same order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes, though there were some variations on account of the tasks used in the tests. Similarly, Fathman tested twenty morphosyntactic items with children and adults using the second language oral production English test (SLOPE) on the functors proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1973, and the result revealed that all the L2 learners acquired English grammatical morphemes in a very similar way, despite the variations in the tasks and scoring procedures (Fathman, 1975). Likewise, Pica tested the hypothesis of the natural order of morpheme acquisition in both natural and formal classroom contexts, and the results revealed that the different conditions of exposure to L2 input did not impact any variation in the order of acquisition (Pica 1983, cited in Goldschneir & DeKeyser, 2001). Thus, studies report that there exists a consistent pattern of acquisition of grammatical morphemes of a second language among learners as they progress towards fluency.

### The monitor hypothesis

The monitor hypothesis, which is a corollary of the acquisition-learning hypothesis, asserts that a learner gains fluency in a second language through *acquisition*, whereas conscious *learning* of the target language functions as a monitor or editor of the language performance. A learner can use their conscious knowledge of the rules

of grammar and syntax of L2 only when performance variables are met (Krashen 2009, p. 15). Monitor use can be understood as a continuum with monitor under-users who do not utilize their conscious learning to edit their language use but focus on getting their meaning across, on one extreme, and monitor over-users who stringently edit their language performance with their learned grammatical knowledge, on the other extreme, and monitor optimal-users in the medial position who know how to utilize their conscious learning to edit their language performance without impeding communication. According to Krashen, “successful monitor users edit their second language output when it does not interfere with communication” (Krashen 2002, p. 12). However, editing leads to “variable performance” under the changing conditions of L2 production, and “monitor users show an overt concern with correct language” (Krashen 2002, p. 13) in their L2 production. Monitor over-users are usually of two types: those who had little chance for acquisition but only have conscious learning to fall back on as they have been through classroom instructions where hard and fast rules of grammar of the language were taught and drilled, and those who had chances to acquire a fair deal of the language but still fall back on their learning as they do not feel confident in depending on their acquired competence as a matter of their personality (Krashen 2009, p. 19).



Acquisition and learning in language production, Krashen 2009, p.16

Monitor underusers are confident language users who prefer to depend on their acquired competence in language performance. They tend to make errors but rarely resort to self-correction. Some monitor under-users may express concern about the importance of grammatical accuracy, but they seldom make any attempt at self-correction in their spoken or written language (Stafford and Covitt, 1978). The optimal monitor users can apply “the use the monitor when it is appropriate and when it does not interfere with communication” (Krashen 2009, p. 20), and the optimal user is able to repair any lacunae in their acquisition with their learned competence, and often they are able to achieve near-native competence in their writing. Nonetheless, according to Krashen, “formal rules, or conscious learning, play only a limited role in second language performance” (Krashen 2009, p. 16), and second language learners are able to apply grammatical rules only when the three necessary conditions of sufficient time “to think about and use the rules” focus on form, where the language producer consciously “thinks about the correctness” of form and knowledge of the rules of the language, which are “extremely complex,” are met (Krashen 2009, p. 16). In communicative contexts where the preconditions do not meet, their utterances reflect “the operation of the acquired system alone, without the intrusion of the conscious grammar” (Krashen 2009, p. 17), and where the conditions are met, the results reflect “the contribution of the conscious grammar” (Krashen 2009, p. 17). However, even when these conditions are met, it is not necessary that the second language user employ his acquired linguistic system, or “the monitor,” to edit the production of his language.

## The input hypothesis

The input hypothesis states that a learner advances to the next level of language competence from their current level when comprehensible input at the rate of  $i + 1$  is provided to them, where  $i$  is the current level or the interlanguage of the learner and  $+1$  is the next level the learner should advance to. The input hypothesis focuses on meaning and not on form (Krashen, 2009, p. 21). The crucial question is how a learner can understand and comprehend meaning when they are not exposed to the form. This is possible, as learners often make use of their extra-linguistic knowledge or the context to comprehend meaning. The input is not always at the ratio of  $i+1$ , but rather it should contain the aspect of  $i+1$  in the input for acquisition to take place. Krashen expounds the hypothesis through four premises, as follows:

1. The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning (Krashen 2009, p. 21). Krashen distinguishes between language acquisition and language learning. Acquisition of L2 is a natural process whereby the learners pick up the language naturally through exposure to the target language without being “aware of the fact that they are acquiring a language.” (Krashen 2009, p. 10), whereas learning formal and conscious knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the target language. He also maintains that the natural language acquisition device (LAD) does not cease to function upon attainment of puberty, but it continues to operate so that even adults can attain native-like competence in a second language, except perhaps for the phonological aspects.
2. We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence ( $i+1$ ). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information (Krashen 2009, p. 21), which relates to all that is part of the contextual and non-verbal cues that aid in comprehending the message, especially when the linguistic item contains structures and lexis that are beyond the current level of the learner. Learners may make use of their schema as well as the paralinguistic features of utterances to understand the message directed to them.
3. When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it,  $i+1$  will be provided automatically (Krashen 2009, p. 22). It means that the input may not always be consistent with the  $i+1$  rate, but it may contain language items that are beyond the current level of the learner, and “such a deliberate attempt to provide  $i+1$  is not necessary” (Krashen 2009, p. 21) because every successful communication presupposes  $i+1$  input.
1. Production ability emerges. It is not taught directly (Krashen 2009, p. 22), but rather emerges as and when the learner has acquired sufficient linguistic input at the rate of  $i+1$ . Hence, the best way to aid fluency is “to provide comprehensible input” (Krashen 2009, p. 21) that is understandable, slightly above their current level, and sufficient exposure to language.

Krashen considers caretaker speech as a typical example of modified input that suits the child’s current level. Similarly, modified input is required for the adult learner too because an adult also acquires a second language in the same way a child does, and as in the case of children, language learners undergo a ‘silent period’, during

which they build up competence in the target language by listening and comprehending, prior to the production stage. The hypothesis rejects the notion that L2 learners acquire language proficiency "...automatically with the use of the language in meaningful situations" (Carroll, 1966, p. 102) when the learner has attained sufficient 'control over the structure of a language'. However, Krashen refutes Carroll's notion because it is not necessary that learning precede acquisition because "we often see acquisition in cases where learning never occurred" (Krashen, 2009, p. 84). Similarly, despite having acquired a great deal of the grammar of the target language, many speakers of a second language do commit mistakes in their language performance. According to Krashen, this phenomenon is specifically evident in the case of the "late acquired items" in the structure of the language. Such mistakes are the results of lacunae in their acquisition, even though the performers have learned the specific rules pertaining to the structure of the language because "even the best learners master only a small subset of the rules of a language" (Krashen, 2009, p. 86). However, they can communicate effectively to the extent that they have acquired the language.

### **The affective filter hypothesis**

This hypothesis states that affective variables of anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence impact second language acquisition. A learner who has a higher mental disposition conducive to language acquisition shall be a better acquirer than a learner without motivation. Besides, a learner who has self-confidence and a low level of anxiety is sure to be a better learner than otherwise (Krashen 2009, p. 31). Moreover, these mental dispositions directly relate to language acquisition and not to language learning per se, as evidenced by studies that have shown that test takers relied heavily on their acquired competence rather than on the learned system while responding to communicative tasks. Furthermore, the hypothesis also posits that acquirers will vary depending on individual affective variables and the process of language learning and acquisition. If a learner's attitudinal disposition is not conducive to L2 acquisition, it suggests that they possess a higher level of affective filter variables, which hinder their ability to assimilate the input. Such learners may comprehend the message, but the input fails to impact the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition (Krashen 2009, p. 31), implying that it has pedagogical implications too. It implies that not only learners should have access to comprehensible input, which is at the level of  $i+1$ , but also that the classroom environment should not put learners on the defensive so that they shall have a lower level of affective filter.

### **Implications for teaching and learning**

Second language teaching should take into consideration the causative variables at work in L2 acquisition for effective language teaching and learning. First, acquisition is more important than learning in L2, and when comprehensible input at the rate of  $i+1$ , coupled with a low level of affective filter, language acquisition is at the optimum level. Conscious learning aids language competence in monitoring the acquirer's language use. Second, aptitude and attitude are vital in second language acquisition. Aptitude relates to learning, whereas attitude is associated with acquisition. Aptitude is the "rate at which persons at the secondary school, university, and adult level learn to criterion" (Carroll 1973, p. 5). It bestows the learner with 'phonetic ability',

grammatical sensitivity, and ‘inductive ability’ (Carroll 1973), while attitude in L2 acquisition relates to factors that facilitate input. These attitudinal factors motivate learners to communicate with speakers of the target language to obtain input. Similarly, an acquirer with a low socio-affective filter will be ‘open’ to input to utilize the heard utterances of L2 input. L2 acquirers with strong socio-affective filters are likely to assimilate very little of the input directed at them. Integrative motivation, which is the language user’s desire to identify themselves with the community that speaks the target language, aids proficiency. Likewise, learners with integrative motivation will be more prone to receptive learning than defensive learning (Stevick, 1976) because they tend to identify themselves with the speakers of the target language in their language behavior, and learners with instrumental motivation may also attain language proficiency because such learners aim at proficiency for utilitarian or practical reasons. Moreover, if the language acquirer could use the target language in communication with other learners of the same language, it would ensure comprehensible input and thereby augment the process of L2 acquisition (Krashen 2009).

## Conclusion

Acquisition is more important than learning in L2, which is possible only through comprehensible input. Conscious learning can contribute to language proficiency only to the extent that comprehensible input is available to the acquirer, especially when they are constrained by situations such as when the learners do not have access to the input from outside the classroom or when they are not able to comprehend the input provided by the world outside. Moreover, classroom instructions facilitate learning, but only as a monitor in language production. Furthermore, learners’ exposure to the target language aids acquisition, and hence, learners must be provided with the opportunity to interact with speakers of the language, ensuring comprehensible input. Learners’ aptitude and attitude, and socio-affective filters too, are vital in attaining language proficiency. Language courses and language teaching should consider these variables that affect language learning and acquisition to facilitate L2 competence for the learners.

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