Language learning

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Today: Second Language Acquisition as a research topic

- What is SLA research? Why is it important?

- Prehistory: ideas before SLA research and their reflection in language learning methods and materials

- History of SLA research: beginning

- Stephen Krashen's ideas about SLA

- Acquisition vs. Learning?

- (Methods of SLA research

- Stages in SLA)

Key questions of SLA research
How do people acquire a second language?

- Processes (What happens in SLA? How does SLA proceed?)

- Circumstances (Were does SLA happen? What influences it?)

- Individual differences and similarities (Do we all aquire second languages more or less the same?)

- First vs. second language aquisition: similarities and differences

- Acquisition and learning; the role of teaching

Related but different from SLA research

- Second language pedagogy (pol. *Glottodydaktyka*): how to teach a second language

- Applied Linguistics:

  "using what we know about (a) language, (b) how it is learned and (c) how it is used, in order to achieve some purpose or solve some problem in the real world" (Schmitt & Celce-Murcia 2002)

History of SLA research in a nutshell

- When did scientific research start?

  In the 1960s / 1970s

- Why then?

  Inspired by L1 acquisition studies

  Interest in SLA without instruction (for example by migrant workers in Germany)

- What was before?

  Reflections on teaching and on languages; reflection on (instructed) learning = Second language pedagogy

Approaches to SL learning before SLA research (USA 1940s-50s)

1. Focus on language systems

"The most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner." (Fries 1945, cited after Mitchel&Myles 1998: 25)

Lado 1957: **Contrastive Analysis**

Critique?

2. Behaviorism and language learning

- B. F. Skinner, "Radical behaviorism"
- learning is habit formation through conditioning
- main strategy in languge learning is imitation
- application in language pedagogy: audio-lingual method, (US) Army method, Foreign Service Institute materials (see https://fsi-languages.yojik.eu/ ; https://fsi-languages.yojik.eu/languages/oldfsi/index.html)

Beginning of SLA research in the USA

- Abandoning behaviorism and a new look at native language (L1) acquisition
(most influential: Noam Chomsky)

- Aquisition vs. learning in L2 (see later slides)

- New look at "mistakes" in L2-speech

Corder 1967 **Error Analysis**
"If we call his [= the learner's] sentences deviant or erroneous, we have implied an explanation before we have ever made a description." (cited after Cook 1993: 21)

- New look at the learner's language

Nemser 1971 "**approximative language**":
"Learner speech at a given time is the patterned product of a linguistic system, L_A, distinct from L_S and L_T and internally structured."

L_A = approximative language, L_S = source language,
L_T = target language

Selinker 1972 "**Interlanguage**":
"Only by treating language learner's language as a phenomenon to be studied in its own right can we hope to develop an understanding of the processes of second language acquisition."

(Both cited after Cook 1993: 17)

Summary: SLA research started (in the USA and Western Europe) arount 1970, when…

- research on L1 acquisition initiated similar research on SLA,

- language acquisition was seen as a creative, rule-governed process,

- the learner's language was seen as a system different from both L1 and L2,

- acquisition was distinguished from learning.

Stephen D. Krashen's ideas about SL acquisition and learning (www.sdkrashen.com)

Most discussed and influential ideas developed around 1980:

1979 The Monitor Model for Second Language Acquisition (article)

1981 Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning (book)

1982 Principles and Practice in Second Language acquisition (book)

1985 The Input Hypothesis (book)

Focus of later work: literacy acquisition (English L1); bilingual education; reading for SLA ("free involuntary reading")

It's worth visiting his homepage!

Krashen in the 1980s: The 5 hypotheses

1. The acquisition-learning hypothesis
2. The monitor hypothesis
3. The natural order hypothesis
4. The input hypothesis
5. The affective filter hypothesis

1. Learning vs. acquisition (Krashen's view and thesis)

learning: conscious process of study, analysis, attention to form and error correction, usually taking place in classroom settings, leading to gathering metalinguistic knowledge

acquisition: subconscious process similar to L1 acquisition, with attention to meaning, taking place during meaningful interaction, usually in natural settings, leading to automatic language use; can also take place in the classroom

Thesis: Learning cannot turn into acquisition.

Acquisition	Learning
implicit, subconscious	explicit, conscious
informal situations	formal situations
uses grammatical 'feel'	uses grammatical rules
depends on attitude	depends on aptitude
stable order of acquisition	simple to complex order of learning

From Vivian Cook's homepage
(copied in 2016, not found on the current homepage at
http://www.viviancook.uk/)

2. Monitor(ing)

- Learning builds up a system that "monitors" language production.

- Utterances are initiated by the acquired system, but **monitored** (altered, corrected, evaluated) by the **learnt** system.

- Some learners are „monitor over-users".

3. Natural order

"We acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others late. The order does not appear to be determined solely by formal simplicity and there is evidence that it is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes."

(Krashen 1985, cited after Mitchell & Myles 1998, 37)

Comment by Mitchell & Myles

Although there is evidently some truth in such a statement, it has been criticized for being too strong. It ignores well-documented cases of language transfer, or of individual variability. Not only are such cases ignored; there is no place for them in Krashen's theory. Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis has also been criticized for being based almost exclusively on the morpheme studies with their known methodological problems, and which, in any case, reflect accuracy of production rather than acquisition sequences.

RE Natural order: English morpheme acquisition order (after Cook 1993, 35)

L1 (Brown 1973)	example	**L2** (Dulay & Burt 1974)
-ing	*eat-ing*	*the/a*
plural *–s*	*book-s*	*-ing*
irreg. past	*brought*	plural *–s*
poss. *–s*	*daddy's*	regular past
the/a		irreg. past
regular past	*looked*	poss. *–s*
3rd person *–s*	*eats*	3rd person *-s*

3.2 English L1 and L2 Morpheme Acquisition Order

English L1	Morpheme	Example	English L2
1	Progressive -*ing*	He is talk*ing*.	3
2	Plural -*s*	There are two cat*s*.	4
3	Past irregular	We *ate*.	7
4	Possessive -*s*	The child'*s* toy	8
5	Articles *a/the*	*The* cat/*A* sunny day	1
6	Past regular -*ed*	They talk*ed*.	6
7	Third person -*s*	He sing*s*.	9
8	Copula *be*	He'*s* tall.	2
9	Auxiliary *be*	She'*s* singing.	5

Source: Saville-Troike (2006: 44)

4. Comprehensible input

The language the learner is exposed to must be understandable and challenging (**i + 1**).

"We acquire language when we understand what people tell us and what we read. There is no need for deliberate memorization; rather, firm knowledge of grammatical rules (a feel for correctness) and a large vocabulary gradually emerge as language acquirers get more "comprehensible input," aural or written language that is understood." (Krashen 2007)

Comprehensible input is central to Krashen's theory

■ Speaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. Speech cannot be taught directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input.

■ If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order – it wil be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input.

(Krashen 1985, cited after Mitchell & Myles)
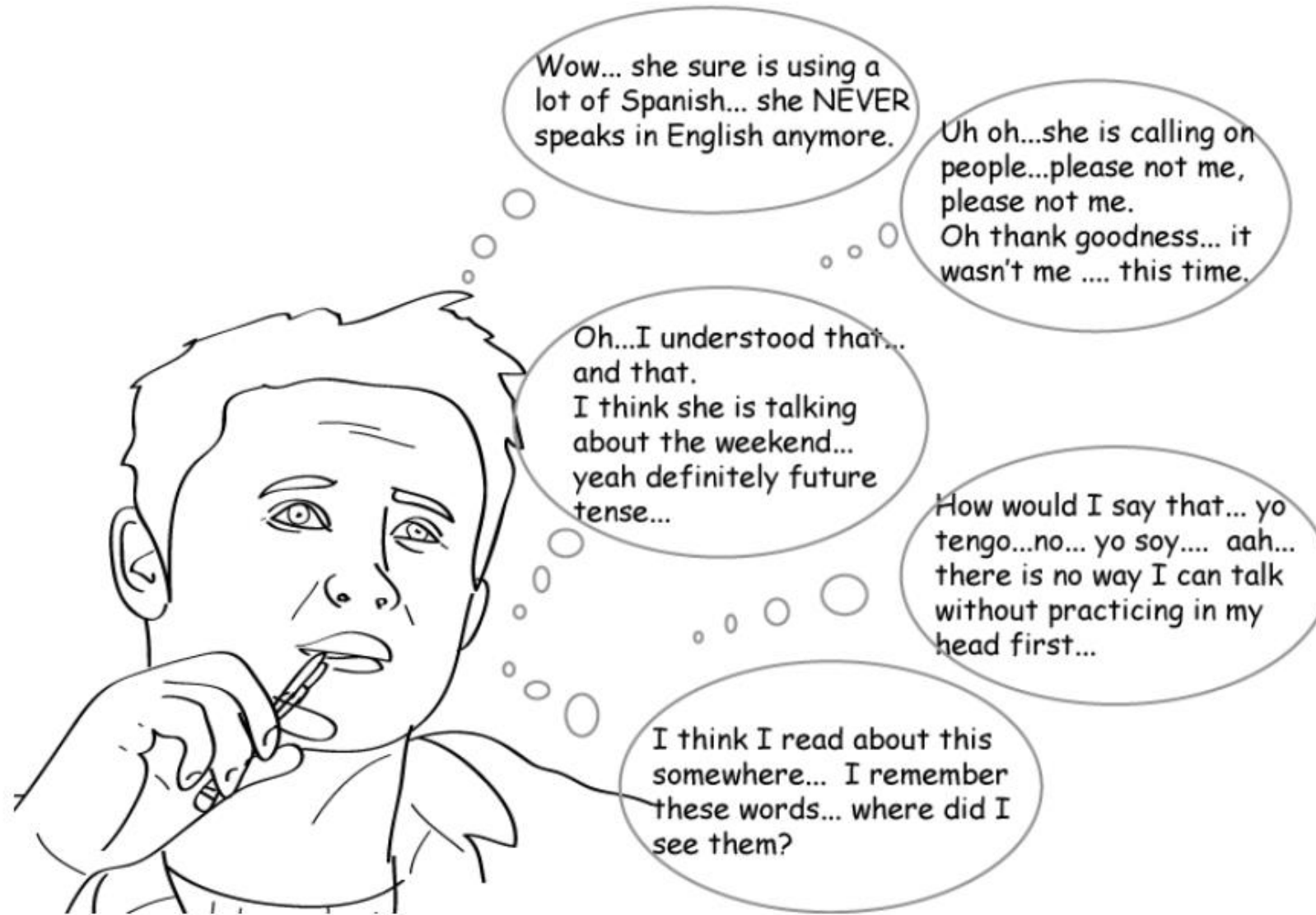
5. Affective filter

- "Affective filter" is an emotional barrier which prevents the learner from receiving the input from the environment

- anxiety

- may be caused by negative attitudes, lack of motivation

The model
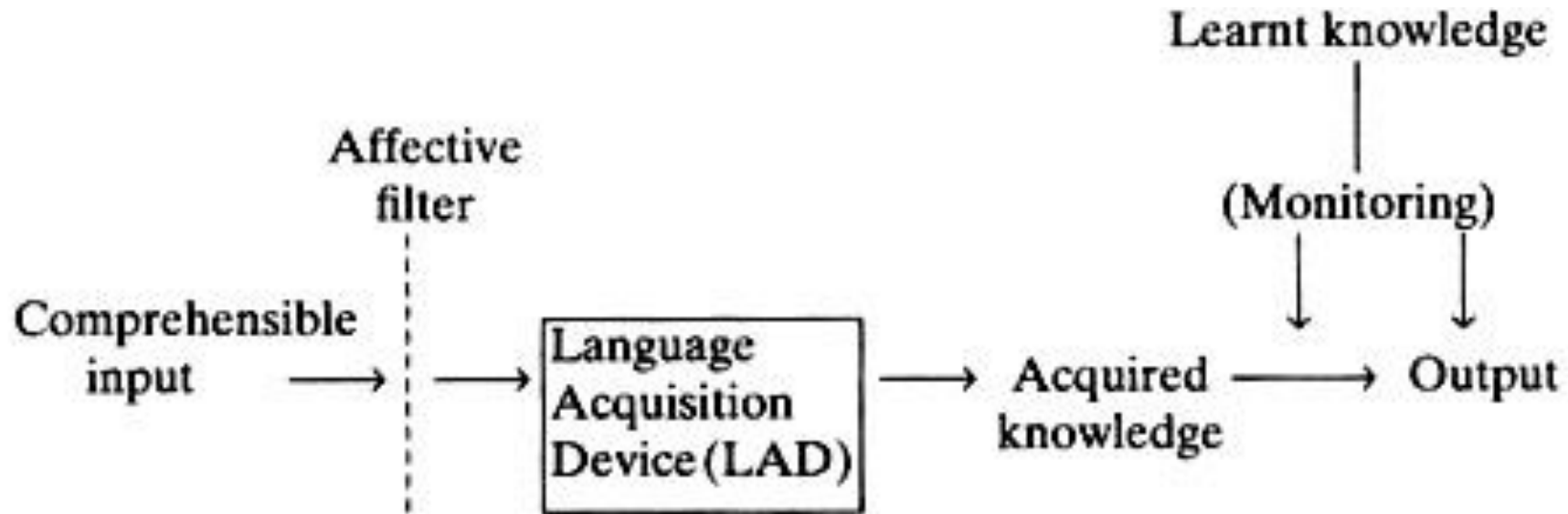
The Input Hypothesis Model of L2 learning and production (adapted from Krashen, 1982, pp. 16 and 32; and Gregg, 1984)

From Vivian Cook's homepage in 2016

Relate the thoughts to the 5 hypotheses! (there is no 1:1)

Mitchell & Myles

To conclude, in this brief account we have reflected criticisms of Krashen's five hypotheses and of his overall model, which have been current almost since Krashen first advanced them. It remains true nonetheless that Krashen's ideas have been highly influential in shaping many research agendas and projects, and in so doing, considerably advancing our understanding of second language acquisition. The Input hypothesis, for example, has stimulated a major ongoing tradition of theorizing and empirical research on input and interaction, reviewed below in Chapter 6. Krashen's main overall weakness was the presentation of what were just hypotheses that remained to be tested, as a comprehensive model that had empirical validity. He then used his hypotheses prematurely as a basis for drawing pedagogical implications.

Recommended reading

Mitchell, Rosamond & Myles, Florence 1998 [or later editions], *Second language learning theories* => Chapter 2 The recent history of second language learning research

Spada & Lightbown 2002, Second Language Acquisition. In N. Schmitt, ed. *Applied linguistics*.

Texts on Vivian Cook's homepage at:

http://www.viviancook.uk/

Texts on Stephen Krashen's homepage at:

http://www.sdkrashen.com/