

Comprehensible Input Hypothesis in SLA Contexts: Myths and Facts

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Introduction

Language learning is said to be a complex activity. It involves various stages wherein a second language learner interacts with multiple contexts and the results of which are the starting of acquisition processes. The theories which support the assumption that language learning is not a systematically governed process are understood be grounded on strong reasons. No hypothesis can convincingly explain the process of learning in a manner that is lucid and easy to comprehend. V.G. Cook and Mark Newson in their book *Chomsky's Universal Grammar : An Introduction* advocates the hypothesis that language learning is innate and so it can be explained only in retrospective effect. Every child, except when the child is cognitively impaired, is gifted with linguistic system within and that system gets operational at different points of time thanks to different factors which are set to influence the child's life. There is no fixed point in time in life or context where in such an activity is set to take place. It is not biologically determined, but socially conditioned. In this paper an attempt is made to look at some of the misconceptions related to language learning process and an argument will be advanced to support comprehensive hypothesis which has reasonably greater degree of credibility in the whole process of language learning.

Assumptions

We learn language in different stages. But, does 'learning' result in acquisition always? The question appears to be very basic and elementary. It may appear to be a

settled matter in various researches done by Stephen Krashen and others. There is no argument that ‘acquisition’ is a natural process of getting a language. But, learning and acquisition are still different. One may have an influence on the other but both are different in meaning for their functions are different as well. Learning implies ‘mastering of grammar rules’ and ‘establishing familiarity’ with the language. Learning, as the term implies is related and connected to teaching. In other words, it is a conscious endeavor and it requires greater efforts on the part of the learners to undergo the drills specified to be able to master the language skill. Hence, this kind of conscious effort is possible only in second language context. Also, a second language is taught when the learner is already familiar with her first language. The base of first language is what determines the quality of learning of second language.

Contextual Connection

The second assumption is there is a clear distinction between first language acquisition and second language learning. We normally attribute ‘learning’ to refer to second language context wherein the first language context is always natural, unconscious and it should be a context for acquisition. Also, the ‘learner’ is a mature person whereas one who ‘acquires’ a language is still in the early stage of learning. The time of learning a language and the contexts wherein language is learnt decide the quality of learning. But, in Krashen’s understanding all these myths are nothing more than mere fallacies. The learner does not need to be young and critical period hypothesis has serious limitation and so it has to be subjected to severe scrutiny.

Acquisition Vs Learning

The term ‘acquisition’ which implies ‘unconscious’ learning is not just limited to first language. It can very well be extended to FLA as well. According to Krashen ‘there

is and there can be no essential difference between FLA and SLA' The way in which we acquired our first language is similar to the way in which we can acquire second language too.

Understanding as a Key Factor

The secrets of getting a language internalized lies in 'understanding'. Krashen says that there is only one way in which we all acquire language. It starts with understanding. Implied in the term 'understanding' is the 'inputs' which are not only optimum but also comprehensible. Once the inputs are understood, then learning becomes involuntary, automatic and easy. No effort is required on the part of the learner in such a situation. But, the condition is that the input is expected to be interesting to such an extent the learner gets into the process of acquisition without any conscious effort. There is no specific period or point of time during which inputs have to be provided. And there is no particular age factor which influences this process.

Input Hypothesis

In order to provide optimum inputs there are a few recommendations from Stephen Krashen. In second language context, we can include a lot of reading materials which are proved to be very effective in terms of providing the learners with inputs required. The books should be written in a language which is a simple conversational only then it will become source for comprehensible inputs. Also, it is recommended we can include story telling sessions too which are also found to be highly effective.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that second language learning theories look at the issues of learning from psychological, socio-cultural and linguistic perspectives. All these perspectives have reasonable degrees of relevance. But, we can't limit our understanding

of the challenges of learning a language only from the perspectives of the theories advanced. The common sense understanding advanced by Krashen is that understanding the language alone will result in acquisition. Hence, in order to understand the input is expected to be comprehensible. Once comprehensible input is given , then, acquisition will become effortless and involuntary. Hence, the teachers and the practitioners in the field of SLA are expected to recommend appropriate reading materials wherein language used should satisfy the condition of ‘comprehensibility’, and this is the only commonsensical way of understanding the language acquisition process.

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