

Chapter Twelve

Applying the Monitor Model Theory on online language teaching and learning

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Abstract

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many education institutions, from primary to tertiary education shifting from physical classroom to online teaching and learning. Higher learning institutions around the world have been exploring the best practices of conducting online teaching and learning to ensure the lesson contents are delivered as effectively as physical classrooms. This chapter explores how second language acquisition (SLA) can best be taught and learned online, by considering Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory. The Monitor Model Theory is famous as one of the underlying theories in second language learning, however, due to the shift towards online learning, its application in teaching and learning is best reassessed. This chapter will explore the historical overview of the Monitor Model Theory, the critical aspects of the theory, review the current findings on the theory and discuss its application in online language teaching and learning, based on the authors' personal observation as language instructors at University Malaysia Kelantan, a public university in Malaysia. It is found that the Monitor Model Theory contributes to effective teaching of second language through its hypotheses such as the Learning and Acquisition Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This chapter will be implicated in motivating language teachers to always tune their online language class to adhere to the principles of the Monitor Model Theory, to ensure effective language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, Monitor model theory, Online learning

Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the learning of languages other than the first language. From a narrower perspective, SLA signifies a language learnt after the first language in a context where the language is used widely in a speech community. Ellis (1997) supported this by defining SLA as the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside a classroom. SLA has been a topic of discussion for many

years among linguists and language learning theorists. Among the topics of discussions regarding this matter is the applicability of a particular SLA theory and how well it can be implemented in the teaching and learning of a second language. Understanding SLA is crucial. Hong (2008) asserted that the understanding of SLA can improve the ability of mainstream teachers to serve the culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms. As a language instructor, it is undeniable that the knowledge in SLA theories has significantly contributed to effective teaching and learning. One of the most prominent theories of SLA is the Monitor Model Theory. While there are many arguments and counterarguments on the applicability of the Monitor Model Theory in a typical face-to-face language lessons, its application in online language teaching and learning needs to be critically weighed as the massive shift towards online teaching and learning is triggered as recent as the recent development on the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Thus, this chapter will discuss how the Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory can be applied in online teaching and learning to ensure its contribution towards learners' acquiring a second language as well as language teaching.

The historical overview of the theory

The Monitor model Theory is an SLA theory developed by Stephen Krashen and was thoroughly explained in his book, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* that was published in 1988. Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory comprises five central hypotheses believed by Krashen (1988) to be the features that influence language learning among second language learners. The five hypotheses mentioned in this theory are the Acquisition Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. The Monitor Model Theory is in fact appealing as it was embraced by educational institutions back in the 80s and 90s. The theory emerged prominently after a series of studies and theories published regarding SLA. Based on the account of Gass and Selinker (2008), it is hard to tell precisely when the modern studies of SLA began to become prominent. However, it may have started in the late 60s from the SLA studies of Corder (1967) on error analysis, Selinker (1972) on interlanguage factors that affects SLA, and some other general studies on SLA that challenged the behaviourist account of SLA. It is only after these academic issues being discussed in regard to SLA, Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory became prominent in SLA, in which most SLA research at that time, studied, tested and challenged the theory.

Though The Monitor Model Theory was highly regarded in the SLA paradigm in the 80s and 90s, according to Zafar (2009), the theory has generated substantial debate and controversy. As noted by Zafar (2009), Krashen's hypotheses are arguable due to the rather inflexible standards being set, and to some SLA scholars, the model is not as persuasive as claimed. McLaughlin (1987) gave a hint that the learning by acquisition idea is difficult to accept as the concept of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) among adult second language learners is widely criticized when Chomsky (1975) asserted that the accessibility to LAD among adults declines with age. McLaughlin as cited in Zafar (2009) stated that what Krashen's (1988) meant by learning and acquisition is also broad and not well defined.

Other than that, the monitor hypothesis, one of the hypotheses under The Monitor Model Theory is also fired with criticism by SLA scholars. Gregg (1984) for instance did not agree with Krashen's idea of positioning acquisition higher than learning, as if learning is being undermined. McLaughlin (1987) added that speech is governed by rule, and if speech is solely produced through acquisition without proper learning, this would result in second language learners uttering words without being able to make meaning. McLaughlin (1987) extended that in communication, the frequency of the learned system-activated utterances cannot be denied which indirectly challenges Krashen's assertion that kids, due to their lower filter, are superior to adults in terms of second language acquisition. The other three hypotheses proposed were also argued by SLA scholars with studies conducted to put the theory into application and tried to fill in possible gaps. Therefore, historically, Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory can be considered as equally prominent and criticized in the field of SLA and discussing the theory would be substantial for any second language instructors.

The critical aspects of the theory

The first hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1988) is the Learning and Acquisition Hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that second language performance is a result of two processes of what he called learning and acquisition. According to him, learning occurs through formal teaching and learners are conscious of the process. Meanwhile, acquisition is a subconscious process where learners acquire the language through meaningful communication. The next hypothesis on SLA proposed by Krashen is the Monitor Hypothesis. The acquisition system is where the speech originated, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor' of the speech produced. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function (Krashen, 1977). In contrast to post-method theories of language learning that see grammar correction as something that should not be emphasized, I somehow agree with the idea that correcting mistakes is an important part of learning. The monitor hypothesis somehow balances approaches to language learning that heavily focus on grammar correction and the one that opposes.

The other SLA approach would be the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashen (1988) reiterated that certain aspects like anxiety, motivation and self-confidence are the determining aspects in facilitating acquisition of a second language. This notion of belief is indeed approved by Dornyei and Otto (1998) who identified motivation as the fundamental cause that inspires the success rate of second language learning. The idea behind the affective filter hypothesis is language learners who possess high levels of motivation, self-confidence and lesser anxiety will have lower affective filters that will enable them to acquire a particular language quicker. In contrast, those who possess lower levels of motivation, self-confidence and more anxiety will have higher affective filters that will impede the learning of language. Not just in language learning, but in education in general, creating a welcoming and safe place where learners can learn is central. Bilash (2011) stressed that for language learning to happen, it

is important for the learners to know that they can actually make mistakes, take risks, and learn from the mistakes.

Another aspect of Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory is the Input Hypothesis. This hypothesis stresses the learning process occurs when the learners obtain 'input' that is slightly higher than their existing stage of competence. For example, as cited from Schutz (2014), if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition will happen when the learner is provided with an input that is slightly higher than the existing knowledge. Krashen (1988) described this as 'i+1' where 'i' is the existing knowledge and '1' is the knowledge that they acquire. The last hypothesis proposed in The Monitor Model Theory is the Natural Order hypothesis. This hypothesis suggested that learners' gain grammatical structures in a natural order from easy to a more complex structure. However, this varies between learners as for some learners, they acquire grammatical structures quicker while for some others, the acquisition is rather late. According to Schutz (2014), this order is independent of the learners' age, their mother tongue as well as exposure to the second language. It is also interesting to note that Krashen himself is opposed to the idea of forming a grammar syllabus based on the Natural Order Hypothesis when the stress of SLA is language acquisition.

Adapting the Monitor Model Theory to online language teaching and learning

The Monitor Model theory is widely applicable in the context of online language teaching and learning. While there are criticisms of the Monitor Model theory in terms of its methodology and testability, Lai and Wei (2019) concluded that Krashen's Monitor Model is a very systematic and comprehensive theory. Kiyamazarslan (2000) in revision of prominent SLA theories had uttered mainly positive judgments on The Monitor Model Theory. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis as according to Kiyamazarslan (2000) had somehow presented the idea among language scholars that learning a second language could actually be separated into learning and acquisition, where learning happens consciously while acquisition subconsciously. In accordance with the notion of understanding, Kiyamazarslan (2000) believed that language instructors should equilibrate the lessons between activities resulting in acquisition and activities resulting in learning. In contrast to Kiyamazarslan (2000) and Zafar (2009) asserted that acquisition is not resulted by learning and he deems that acquisition can be excellently comprehended when depicted as a process enhanced by the learned system. Therefore, according to him, instead of separating learning and acquisition, the two aspects should be integrated and acknowledged.

However, based on the result of his study, Kiyamazarslan (2000) stated that there is a clear distinction between learning and acquisition that even a fluent speaker would commit language mistakes when speaking unconsciously despite knowing the underlying rules learned. In this regard, an online language teaching and learning should consider the distinction between learning and acquisition. While most of the learning materials uploaded to the Learning Management System (LMS) are for the purpose of learning, a language instructor of an online lesson, according to the Monitor Model theory, has to ensure acquisition happens. While in a physical class acquisition happens through live

communications, in an online class, a language instructor can initiate a live online communication via usable applications such as the LMS itself, WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Meet or Zoom platforms. To cater to low bandwidth learners, recorded videos on YouTube can be used to expose learners to native speakers' language use to ensure acquisition. Online language teaching and learning has to also consider the Monitor Model's Input Hypothesis. It is important however to first note language scholars' divided opinions regarding the Input Hypothesis. Kiyamazarslan (2000) believed that the Input Hypothesis could be useful and for it to be effective in second language lessons, teachers can put more emphasis on listening and reading comprehension activities that provide added values to the learners' 'comprehensible input'. As opposed to that, Zafar (2009) stated that the effectiveness of the Input Hypothesis is hard to be proven. This is because according to him, Krashen and Terrell (1988) did not provide considerable proof to support the (i+1) argument but by only relying on certain phenomena. It is also hard to know how much input can be considered as comprehensible, and this makes the theory even more vague as stated by Zafar (2009). Gass and Selinker (2008) in the same understanding added that the input hypothesis emphasizes exclusively on the importance of 'comprehensible input' to the neglect of the output factor. Without considering the output, it is hard to observe the gaps made by learners between the input they received and the output they produced. For online language teaching and learning, a language instructor has to make sure that any input given to the learners has to be tested so that the output produced can be measured to see the effectiveness of the lesson. The weekly rows of the LMS platform have to contain at least an input, in forms of videos, audios or notes, and output, in forms of practices or quizzes. It is also crucial that the input given in an online lesson is comprehensible as suggested by the Monitor Model's Input Hypothesis and this can be done by knowing learners' proficiency level. Learners' proficiency level can be evaluated from the pre-tests or from their mastery of the previous topics. Different proficiency levels would require different input given and this has to be carefully crafted on the LMS to avoid 'one size fits all'.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is another hypothesis of the Monitor Model that can be considered in online teaching and learning of language. It is imperative however to first note language scholars' divided opinions regarding the hypothesis as it is criticised by Zafar (2009) who asked questions such as in what way does the affective filter define which portions of language are to be selected and rejected? And how can fossilisation and inter-language development be determined by the filter? This is because according to Zafar (2009) there are cases of children who are affected by the thoughts of timidity, nervousness and lack of self-assurance but still succeed to learn their first language successfully. Despite the critics, Kiyamazarslan (2000) believed that the Affective Filter Hypothesis can be useful in a second language classroom. In contrast to what is mentioned by Zafar (2009), though learners are anxious, they are able to master the first language as that is the language they speak at home, a place where they are secured. However, when talking about a second language environment, learners can always revert back to their first language when they are too anxious to use the second language. In this situation, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is relevant and as cited by Kiyamazarslan (2000), the teaching and learning goal of language

learning must not only comprise comprehensible input but it has to also produce a surrounding that nurtures a low affective filter. In an online class therefore, a language instructor has to ensure a low affective filter through online lectures or other activities conducted. An online conversation between instructor and learners, and between learners, has to cater to all learners and be supportive, where low proficiency learners will find it fine to make mistakes. Online practices and quizzes have to consider the $i+1$ factor to lower the affective filter, where they must not be too difficult, but slightly challenging for learning to happen.

Suggestions for adapting the Monitor Model Theory on online language teaching and learning

This section is based on the authors' personal observation of the implementation of the Monitor Model Theory on online language teaching and learning in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia. Among the theories and approaches of SLA, Krashen's (1988) Monitor Model Theory has given a major impact in Malaysian language teachers' understanding of English as a second language teaching and learning.

Despite the notion of the learning-acquisition hypothesis, a rather common understanding among language instructors is that learners should thoroughly learn language through formal in class lessons. However, it has to be noted that learners learn more from their formal and non-formal communication than syllabus-based topics from the textbook and repetition of grammar rules that they have in class. This is clearly observed from learners who came from a background of family that practices English at home and learners who are exposed to English language through television programs. In fact, the view on this matter is supported by Merritt (2012) who said that social media like television, songs and videos accelerate the acquisition of English language as compared to grammar books. Thus, it is believed that English language teachers should always keep in mind to provide an online classroom environment that has a mixture of 'learning' and 'acquisition'. While they have to follow the syllabus for students' 'learning', they also have to provide an environment of 'acquisition' in class. In fact, referring to the hypothesis, Krashen (1988) also added that learning is actually less important than acquisition. Hence, promoting acquisition in an online classroom should be a priority among teachers and this can be done by having group works that enhance communication between learners, storytelling, thematic listening and speaking activities as well as incorporating social media for more exposure towards English language.

The next hypothesis on SLA proposed by Krashen (1988) that can contribute to effective online teaching of a second language is the monitor hypothesis. For English language teachers, this understanding helps in teaching as in not to neglect error correction. Though post-method theorists suggest approaches such as a communicative approach that pays less attention to error correction, error correction should go hand in hand with meaningful language learning. When learners are not corrected for the language mistakes they have made, they tend to repeat the same mistakes repeatedly in the future until they figure the right way the mistakes should be. This is indeed time consuming and the mistakes might

form a habit after a series of uncorrected repetition. Although learning a second language is done subconsciously and the action of correcting errors in oral reading as well as writing will not result in acquisition, the correction of errors by language instructors may trigger conscious second language learning. Nevertheless, it is also important for a teacher to be aware that instant error correction might affect learners' motivation to learn. Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) asserted that teacher's instant correction might affect learners' affective filter in a way that it might develop fear of mockery among classmates. Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) continued by suggesting that it is possible for teachers to correct learners' errors, but it has to be done indirectly or by consulting the learners individually about the error. One way to indirectly correct language errors would be by collecting all errors made by the learners and addressing them after the lesson. Another way that is possible is also by praising the learners first for their participation before commenting on the errors with positive facial expression and body language. However, error correction should not be excessively done and it is highly important to note what Krashen (1977) implied as error correction should only be used to assist learners to be aware of particular points. Thus, it is convinced that the applying the monitor model could contribute to an effective teaching of second language.

The other SLA approach that contributes to effective online second language teaching is the affective filter hypothesis. The affective filter hypothesis is the first thing that should be comprehended by language instructors when developing and executing lessons in an online classroom. By considering the idea of the affective filter, language teachers could increase learners' self-confidence and lessen their anxiety that would lead to better classroom participation. According to a study conducted by Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013), keeping learners' affective filter low can be done by showing positive gestures while teaching, making jokes, telling stories and appreciating their answers. Plenty of research that is based on the framework of the affective filter hypothesis also noted that materials selection play a crucial role in lowering learners' affective filter. For instance, Wachob (2006) said that learners' motivation depends on a variety of factors, one of them would be teaching materials and what they do in class. As Gardner et. al. (1989) proposed, engaging learners' interest in class can be done by using authentic materials that relate to their daily lives. As an example, when it comes to writing activity, it is best for teachers to select writing topics that relate to learners' life and about something that they have experienced instead of topics they hardly talked about. By this way, their self-confidence would increase thus lowering their affective filter. This of course would increase learners' participation that will consequently lead to effective language teaching.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Monitor Model Theory is a noteworthy set of five hypotheses that were developed by Stephen Krashen in the late 1970s beginning with individual hypotheses. Studying the Monitor Model Theory can be said as fascinating as although the theory was popular in the 80s and 90s and adopted by educational systems, the theory has also been questioned and challenged by some language scholars. Despite the challenges, it does not

mean that this theory is unworkable for language instructors, but as Ridgway (2000) mentioned, what is taken from the theory and applied to the online classroom must be weighted accordingly. If a language instructor needs to adapt the language approaches in a classroom, it is always crucial to consider how he or she would adopt them (Ridgway, 2000).

The Monitor Model Theory has its own potential impact on SLA, and it is very much relevant to be adopted and adapted notwithstanding the complaints made by language scholars. This is because most complaints regarding the theory are based on the perception that the theory is hardly proven, and the terms used such as ‘comprehensible input’ and ‘acquisition’ are too vague and not specific making it hard to define. However, it is somehow better to be a bit abstract as this will give the language instructors, who are involved in applying the theory in classrooms, to adapt and adjust the theory based on their understanding. Taking ‘comprehensible input’ for instance, language instructors may define how much input they think is comprehensible for the learners. Other than that, based on the disapproving comments that say acquisition and learning should not be separated, despite following the hypothesis straightforwardly, language instructors can always tie learning and acquisition together by providing the learners with conscious learning in the online classroom as well as subconscious learning interchangeably. Based on this idea of adapting the theory, language instructors in the future can always conduct a simple action research in their classrooms to see in what way the hypotheses can work effectively with the learners.

All in all, understanding SLA will undeniably contribute to effective online teaching of a second language. This has indeed been proven from a number of research as well as my own experience as a language teacher. The most significant would be the aforementioned hypotheses such as the Learning and Acquisition Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Based on the discussion above, it is very well convincing that understanding SLA theories in depth must be a priority among second language teachers as Charlemagne said, ‘to have a second language is to possess a second soul’.

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