THE IMPACT OF OLS ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract: *Within the larger context of the Monitor Model worked out by Krashen (1977), the paper under consideration is concerned with the importance of comprehensible input in Second Language Acquisition. Thus, the article is devoted to the impact comprehensible input has on the target learners' production. The corpora are collected from Romanian informants (Military Technical Academy students) that joined ERASMUS+ intercultural mobilities abroad in various receiving countries. More precisely, the performance of the participants enrolled for online linguistic support (OLS) covering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) mainly, is thoroughly looked into to record the progress these outgoing subjects made from the placement test to final assessment in terms of linguistic competences pertaining to grammar, vocabulary, key-communicative phrases, reading and listening in English, French, Italian and Spanish as target languages. A statistical analysis also comes to reinforce linguistic progress or fall within the Second Language Acquisition model under consideration. The contribution to the paper consists in both the collection of data and the interpretative remarks regarding the current scientific findings that account for the respondents' performance*

Keywords*: OLS; MOOCs; input hypothesis; key-communicative phrases*

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MONITOR MODEL

Krashen (1978) explicitly and essentially adopts the notion of a language acquisition device (LAD), which is a metaphor Chomsky used for children's innate knowledge of language. Krashen's approach is a collection of five hypotheses which constitute major claims and assumptions about how the L2 code is acquired. The hypotheses forming the model are the following:

- *Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*. There is a distinction to be made between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is subconscious, and involves the innate language acquisition device which accounts for children's L1. Learning is conscious and is exemplified by the L2 learning which takes place in many classroom contexts.
- *Monitor Hypothesis*. What is learned is available only as a monitor, for purposes of editing or making changes in what has already been produced.
- *Natural Order Hypothesis*. We acquire the rules of language in a predictable order.
- *Input Hypothesis*. Language acquisition takes place because there is comprehensible input. If input is understood, and if there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided.
- *Affective Filter Hypothesis*. Input may not be processed if the affective filter is "up" (e.g. if conscious learning is taking place and/or individuals are inhibited).

Corder (1967, 1971) made a clear-cut distinction between input and intake. Thus, input refers to what is available to the learner, whereas intake refers to what is actually internalized [or, in Corder's (1981, 1983) terms, "taken in"] by the learner. Anyone who has been in a situation of learning a second/foreign language is familiar with the situation in which the language one hears is totally incomprehensible, to the extent that it may not even be possible to separate the stream of speech into words. Whereas this is input, because it is available to the learner, it is not intake, because it "goes in one ear and out the other"; it is not integrated into the current learner-language system. This sort of input appears to serve no greater purpose for the learner than does the language that is never heard. Conceptually, one can think of the input as the language (in both spoken and written forms) to which the learner is exposed (Corder, 1992).

We turn to the Input Hypothesis, developed by Krashen, as part of his overall sketch of acquisition. It is a supplement to the Natural Order

Hypothesis. If there is a natural order of acquisition, how is it that learners move from one point to the other? The Input Hypothesis provides the answer. Second languages are acquired by "understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input." (Krashen 1985:2).

Krashen defined "comprehensible input" in a particular way. Essentially, comprehensible input is that bit of language that is heard/ read and that is slightly ahead of a learner's current state of grammatical knowledge. Language containing structures a learner already knows essentially serves no purpose in acquisition. Similarly, language containing structures way ahead of a learner's current knowledge is not useful. A learner does not have the ability to "do" anything with those structures. Krashen defined a learner's current state of knowledge as *i* and the next stage as *i* + 1. Thus the input a learner is exposed to must be at *i* + 1 level in order for it to be of use in terms of acquisition. "We move from *I*, our current level to *i* + 1, the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing *i* + 1 (Krashen 1985:2).

Krashen assumed a Language Acquisition Device, that is, an innate mental structure capable of handling both first and second language acquisition. The input activates this innate structure. But only input of a very specific kind (i+1) will be useful in altering a learner's grammar. In Krashen's view, the Input Hypothesis is central to all of acquisition and also has pedagogical implications for the classroom: a) 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; b) 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 will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input (Gass *et al*., 2008).

The teacher's main role, then, is to ensure that students receive comprehensible input. However, despite its attractiveness (and clearly no one would deny the importance and significance of input), there are various difficulties with the concept. First, the hypothesis itself is not specific as how to define levels of knowledge. Thus, if we are to validate this hypothesis, we must know how to define a particular level so that we can know how to define a particular level (say, level 1904) so that we can know whether the input contains linguistic level 1905 and, if so, whether the learner, as a result, moves to level 1905. Krashen only stated that

> 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 extralinguistic information." (Krashen, 1982:21).

Second is the issue of quantity. Krashen states that there has to be sufficient quantity of the appropriate input. But what is sufficient quantity? How do we know whether the quantity is sufficient or not? One token, two tokens, 777 tokens? And, perhaps the quantity necessary for change depends on developmental level, or how ready the learner is to acquire a new form.

Third, how does extralinguistic information aid in actual acquisition, or internalization of a linguistic rule, if by "understanding" Krashen meant understanding at the level of meaning?

1.1 Input enhancement through practice. Krashen's (1977) Revisited Approach. Given the previously-discussed limitations of the Monitor Model elaborated by Krashen (1977), a revisited approach is needed. Therefore, input should be associated with implicit and explicit knowledge as defined and enlarged upon later on in the literature (DeKeyser: 2003). A significant function of language instruction is the manipulation and enhancement of input. That is, teachers can provide varying degrees of explicitness in the input. A goal of SLA research is to determine the effectiveness of explicitness in terms of learners' developing grammars. The field has changed from a position in the 1970s and 1980s in which, following Krashen, what was needed to create implicit knowledge (more or less equivalent to linguistic competence) was comprehensible input. Explicit input led to explicit knowledge. In later years, the fusion of implicit/explicit input and implicit/explicit knowledge became more apparent. For example, DeKeyser (2003) suggested that explicit learning can result in implicit knowledge through practice.

It is essential in understanding how explicit information might result in implicit knowledge or how declarative knowledge becomes procedural knowledge; it is essential in understanding how information might become automized. In cognitive accounts of language learning, practice takes on a number of forms, but the common ingredient is that the learner interacts with the language in some meaningful (not solely rote) manner. This can include language use (some interactive-based task) or some response to an audio prompt (answering a comprehension question following a listening or reading passage). Loschly and Bley-Vroman (1993) proposed a scheme for determining language demands during language use,

distinguishing whether a form is natural in the task, useful to the task, or essential to the task. They used this scheme to determine the proposed effectiveness of different kinds of tasks, in terms of automatization, control, and whether a task relates to comprehension or production.

The concept of input enhancement highlights ways in which input is made salient to learners (Sharwood Smith: 1991). As Polio (2007) notes, Sharwood Smith's focus was not on what happened in the learner's mind, but rather on what was done to the input. Given that input enhancement is a means of drawing a learner's attention to something, an underlying assumption is that noticing is a prerequisite to processing of the input.

Salience, in Sharwood Smith's view, can come about by a learner's own internal devices (his or her own processing mechanisms) or by something that is externally created; this latter is input enhancement. Smith refers to two variables involved in externally created salience: elaboration and explicitness (e.g. metalinguistic information).

Input enhancement has not been treated in precisely the same way and the results have not always been consistent. For instance Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, and Doughty (1955) found that noticing and learning resulted from textual enhancement; Izumi (2002) found noticing, but not learning; and Leow (1997) found neither noticing nor learning. Han (ms.), in her review of input enhancement studies, found numerous methodological differences among studies, making it difficult to state with certainty the extent to which visual input enhancement facilitates learning. She draws attention to 10 insights emanating from studies of input enhancement (pp. 29-30):

- Simple enhancement is capable of inducing learner noticing of externally enhanced forms in meaning-bearing input.
- Whether or not this then leads to acquisition depends largely on learner's readiness.
- Learners can automatically notice forms that are meaningful.
- Simple enhancement of a longer term is more likely to incite learner noticing of the target form than simple enhancement of a short term.
- Simple enhancement is more likely to induce learner noticing of the target form when sequential to comprehension than when it is concurrent with comprehension.
- Simple enhancement of a non-meaningful form does not hurt comprehension.
- Simple enhancement of a meaningful form contributes to comprehension.
- Simple enhancement is more effective if it draws focal rather than peripheral attention.
- Simple enhancement, when combined with input flood, is likely to evoke aberrant noticing, resulting in overuse of the enhanced form.

Compound enhancement (combining different types of enhancement) is more likely to induce deeper cognitive processing than simple enhancement.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ERASMUS+ ONLINE LINGUISTIC SUPPORT

One of the main objectives of the ERASMUS+ EU mobility programme for education is to boost participants' linguistic skills and offer them support for their language training. With that in mind, the Online Linguistic Support feature, also known as OLS has been set up to give ERASMUS+ participants the chance to have their language skills assessed when studying abroad. Thus, ERASMUS+ participants have the possibility to follow online language courses to improve their target-language even more. ERASMUS+ OLS "Live Coaching" offers participants who are enrolled in an OLS language course a variety of different ways to improve their language skills. "Live Coaching" features have been designed to complement the self-paced language course with synchronous and interactive elements. With the OLS "Live Coaching" features, participants have an opportunity to attend MOOCs (open classes based on the model of Massive Open Online Courses). MOOCs are interactive, educational videos tailored for three different levels of the Common European Framework for languages: A, B, C. Level A is for those learning to get by in a language. Level B is for those who are a bit more independent. Lastly, level C is for learners who already feel comfortable in the language. Each MOOC has a duration of around 30 minutes and is based on topics that are directly related to what participants can experience during their ERASMUS+ mobility. During MOOCs, participants are encouraged to interact with both the tutor and other participants via the chat function, which makes it a very interactive experience. All the participants who are enrolled in an OLS language course may attend the MOOC sessions in the language they are learning. There is no limit to the number of MOOCs one participant can attend. Currently, one MOOC is scheduled for each language every week. MOOCs are recorded, which means that participants can freely watch MOOCs again, regardless of whether they attended the session or not. The MOOC recordings are available on the OLS platform, to view at any time.

Central to the adaptation process is host communication competence, the ability to

communicate in accordance with the norms and practices of the host culture and actively engage in its social communication processes. This means that, should we choose to adapt successfully, we would need to concentrate on acquiring new cultural communication practices and be willing to put aside some of the old ones. To become competent in the host communication system, in turn, requires active participation in the interpersonal and mass communication processes of the local community. Just as we cannot learn to swim without actually plunging into the water, we cannot truly learn to communicate without actually communicating." (Kim 2001). Table 1 illustrates a sample of a MOOC sequence where intercultural issues are explicitly pointed out to the Romanian outgoing students under scrutiny.

Table 1. Intercultural communication issues. MOOC sample.

What the British say	What the British mean	What the foreigner understands
I hear what you say	I disagree and do not want to discuss it further	He accepts my point of view
That's not bad	That's good	That's poor
Quite good	A bit disappointing	Quite good
I would suggest	Do it or be prepared to justify yourself	Think about the idea, but do what you like
I was a bit disappointed that	I am annoyed that	It doesn't really matter
Very interesting	That is clearly nonsense	They are impressed
I'll bear it in mind	I've forgotten it already	They will probably do it
I'm sure it's my fault	It's your fault	Why do they think it was their fault?
You must come for dinner	It's not an invitation, I'm just being polite	I will get an invitation soon
Could we consider some other options?	I don't like your idea	They have not yet decided

3. THE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ASSESSMENT TEST RESULTS

Table 2 encapsulates the results obtained by MTA respondents who joined an ERASMUS+ mobility throughout the past academic year (2015-2016). Thus, 30 informants in an aggregate of 47 outgoing students (63.82%) sat for a placement assessment in English, 13 respondents applied for a placement test in French (27.65%), 3 informants sat for a placement test in Italian (6.38%), and 1 respondent had his Spanish linguistic abilities tested in the placement assessment (2.15%). In an aggregate of 47 MTA outgoing students, 29 (61.70%) attended massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Table 2. The results obtained by outgoing MTA ERASMUS+ students in the target language[1]

No.	I	Target language	Receiving country	Placement assessment	Final Language Assessment	Online Linguistic Support
1	BI	English	Belgium	C1	C2	YES
2	MR	English	Spain	C1	C2	-
3	MS	English	Netherlands	C1	C2	-
4	MA	English	Belgium	B2	C1	YES
5	SM	English	Belgium	B2	C1	YES
6	MF	English	Spain	B2	C1	-
7	NB	English	Spain	B1	B2	YES
8	AI	English	France	B1	B2	YES
9	MD	English	France	A2	B2	YES
10	SA	English	Portugal	A1	A2	-
11	CL	English	Belgium	C2	C2	YES
12	DM	English	Belgium	C2	C2	YES
13	AA1	English	Portugal	C2	C2	-
14	AA2	English	Belgium	C2	C2	YES
15	AC	English	Germany	C2	C2	YES
16	SB	English	Spain	C2	C2	YES
17	AA3	English	Spain	C2	C2	-
18	NV	English	Portugal	C2	C2	-
19	SA	English	Portugal	C2	C2	-
20	GF	English	Germany	C1	C1	-
21	MF	English	Portugal	C1	C1	-
22	CI	English	Spain	C1	C1	-
23	CS	English	Belgium	B2	B2	-
23	CC	English	Belgium	B2	B2	YES
24	PB	English	Portugal	C2	B2	-
25	FA	English	Germany	C1	B2	YES
26	UR	English	Spain	C1	B2	YES
27	SD	English	Bulgaria	C1	B1	YES
28	MO	English	Spania	B2	B1	-

[1] The current findings have been obtained within the ERASMUS+ programme (in the academic year 2015-2016) run by Military Technical Academy.

29	PR	English	Portugal	B2	B1	YES
30	AL	French	France	C1	C2	-
31	AL	French	France	B1	C2	YES
32	AR	French	France	B1	C1	YES
33	AR	French	France	B1	C1	YES
34	LA	French	France	B1	B2	YES
35	MR	French	France	B1	B2	YES
36	AD	French	France	B1	B2	YES
37	CC	French	France	B1	B2	YES
38	MA	French	France	A1	B1	-
39	OI	French	France	A1	A2	YES
40	PI	French	France	C1	B2	-
41	CS	French	France	B2	B1	-
42	PI	French	France	B2	B1	YES
43	SA	Italian	Italy	B1	B2	YES
44	BV	Italian	Italy	A2	B1	YES
45	MA	Italian	Italy	A2	B1	YES
46	RS	Spanish	Spain	A2	C1	YES

Key: I = Informant; TL = Target Language; RC = Receiving Country; PA = Placement Assessment; FLA = Final Language Assessment, OLS = Online Linguistic Support; E = English; F = French, S = Spanish, I = Italian.

As for the placement test, 21 informants (44.68%) obtained very good results (level C1 or C2), 19 subjects (40.42%) got good results (level B1 or B2) and only 7 respondents (14.90%) scored low results (level A1 or A2). Once the international mobility completed, 24 informants (51.07%) improved their linguistic abilities, 14 respondents (29.78%) maintained their level and only 9 informants in an aggregate of 47 students tested (19.15%) had a worse performance in final language assessment, scoring, thus, poorer results than those they got in placement test. The informants' performance was strongly influenced by the massive open online courses that proved useful in the respondents' linguistic improvement.

Table 3. The Statistical Analysis of the assessment test results

Category	Value	Per centage	Online Linguistic Support	
The number of students whose final language assessment results were better than those got in placement test	24	51.07%	18	75.00 %
The number of students whose final language assessment results were identical to those got in placement test	14	29.78%	6	42.85 %
The number of students whose final language assessment results were worse than those got in placement test	9	19.15%	5	55.55 %
Aggregate	**47**	**100%**	**29**	**61.70 %**
Outgoing students who obtained C2 in the placement language assessment.	10	21.28%	5	50.00 %
Outgoing students who obtained C1 in placement language assessment.	11	23.40%	4	36.36 %
Outgoing students who obtained B2 in placement language assessment.	9	19.14%	5	55.55 %
Outgoing students who obtained B1 in placement language assessment.	10	21.28%	10	100%
Outgoing students who obtained A2 in placement language assessment.	4	8.52%	4	100%
Outgoing students who obtained A1 in placement language assessment.	3	6.38%	1	33/33 %
Aggregate	**47**	**100%**	**29**	**61.70 %**

4. CONCLUSIONS

As the current statistical analysis showed, exposure to comprehensible input plays a crucial part in language acquisition. More precisely, 51.07% MTA outgoing students performed better in final language assessment than in placement test after successfully making good use of the online linguistic support by attending the required massive open online courses. The recorded attendance was 75.% with 18 students in an aggregate of 24 having completed online training. As the percentage of informants having enrolled for live coaching lowered, their linguistic performance also decreased considerably. Thus, 29.78% MTA outgoing students performed identically in final and placement assessment after completing online training, whereas 19.15% respondents performed worse in final assessment. MOOC attendance was 42.85% for the category of informats whose final language assessment results were identical to those they got in placement test, and 55.55% for those respondents whose final language assessment results were worse than those they scored in placement test.

The constant and poor performance of those respondents who didn't make any progress after being exposed to comprehensible input may lie in the amount of input quantity they were in contact

with. This is tightly related to the Monitor Model which has its own limitations, since precise quantity of exposure to comprehensible input is not mentioned by Krashen et al. (1977, 1978) in the claims he worked out. As the model was revisited in the literature (DeKeyser: 2003), comprehensible input was associated with explicit knowledge and thereby input manipulation and enhancement through practice. It is from this perspective that MOOCs and their influence on the Romanian informants tested had been interpreted in the current study.

Beside comprehensible input as such, the ability to communicate according to the norms and practices of the host culture and actively engage in its social communication processes is central to language acquisition, too. Therefore, in line with Kim (2001) should we choose to adapt to the receiving country and implicitly to a new linguistic context, we would need to focus on acquiring new cultural communication practices and be willing to put aside, at least for a while, some of the old ones.

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