

# Does the Monitor Theory Provide An Adequate Model For The Second Language Classroom?

(4)

The Second Language Teaching Program

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stephen Krashen relates theory and practice by establishing a model for a second-language teaching program. This program includes elements of Acquisition and Learning, but its focus is upon intake for Acquisition. Krashen discounts the theoretical value of dividing a program into units of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Instead, he emphasizes widely different tasks which tap the Acquired system.

The teaching program which Krashen proposes is not as practical as he would have us believe. The Acquisition-Learning distinction places undue emphasis upon the process of language learning, while ignoring its product. Moreover, intake and output are treated unequally, as are competence and performance. In the end, Krashen's model is almost wholly theoretical, with practical overtones which do not truly give the model any substance.

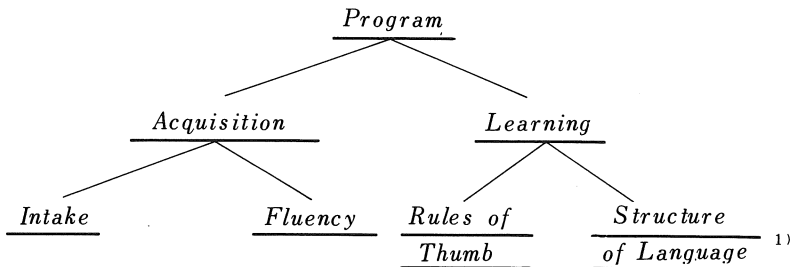
A practical model can be constructed by dismantling Krashen's theoret-

ical model and reconstructing its elements in a logical and orderly fashion. In the process, the “four skills” can be reinstated as vital elements, although not necessarily divisions, of the program. In addition, Acquisition and Learning are relegated to a lesser status, while intake and output play a more central role in the teaching-learning process. These in turn can be placed in the theoretical context of competence and performance.

The new model, that of Performance and Ability, has its practical application in the second-language classroom. Although it contradicts the Monitor model, the Practical model provides guidelines which the second-language classroom teacher can use to direct students toward a meaningful and productive second-language experience.

## 2. THE MONITOR MODEL

Krashen asserts that the division of a second-language program into the “four skills” (speaking, listening, reading, writing) may not be the optimal division, and that his research on the Monitor Theory supports this assertion. As an alternative, he offers a theoretical model for a second-language teaching program, based on the Acquisition-Learning distinction, which he illustrates according to the following “tree diagram”:



In this model, the emphasis is clearly upon *intake*, which is obligatory

and is intended to lead to Acquisition. *Fluency*, which also leads to Acquisition, makes use of the “utterance initiator”, sometimes utilizing non-acquired devices such as Routines and Patterns or the first language surface structure to assist in performance. The Learning node incorporates *rules of thumb*, which are also meant to aid performance, and an optional *structure* element, or “language appreciation” unit for the Monitor over-user.

Many of the concepts presented in the above illustration seem to create an imbalance in the second-language program. Although Krashen’s tree diagram gives the impression that Acquisition and Learning are of equal importance, the Monitor Theory subordinates Learning to Acquisition. The ideal program would present a factual, rather than illusory, balance between Acquisition and Learning.

Krashen’s focus upon intake for Acquisition is characteristic of the imbalance found in his model. It is true that qualitative intake is necessary to enable the processes of language achievement, but Learning is just as much a process as Acquisition, and can almost equally be served by identical intake. It follows that intake should be represented as influencing both Acquisition and Learning.

Output is presented in Krashen’s theoretical model as an almost unnecessary byproduct of language acquisition. Yet all processes, no matter how intangible, work their way to a tangible goal. Language teaching (or learning, or acquisition) is one of these processes, and as such there must be some product which results from its practice. Ability might qualify as a theoretical product of the language-teaching program, but ultimately performance emerges as the necessary practical indicator of second-language achievement.

The various elements in Krashen’s program (intake, fluency, rules of

thumb, structure) cover the range of students from Monitor under-user to Monitor over-user. However, optional elements do not serve every student, and Krashen intends his structural element to be used only by Monitor over-users. Of course intake for Acquisition can also serve these students (see above), but Krashen's program does not provide adequate structural support for the Monitor under-user. The ideal program, instead of providing its elements with a balance of Monitor users, would ensure a balance of Acquisition and Learning for each student, no matter what his learning style might be. In doing so it would bring to bear both theoretical and practical aspects of the second-language experience, and cultivate both ability and performance among students of widely varying learning styles.

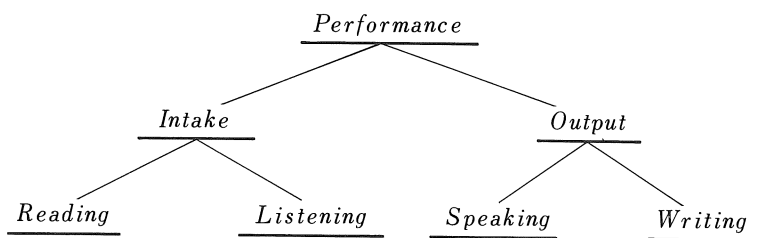
### 3. THE PERFORMANCE MODEL

The first step in developing a practical model will be to establish intake and output as indispensable elements of the teaching program. It will be demonstrated in the ensuing discussion that these are interrelated in a complex manner, but for the time being, they can be illustrated by simple tree diagrams in which intake consists of reading and listening, and output consists of speaking and writing:



Performance is necessary in a practical language-teaching program. On first consideration we might take it for granted that speaking and writing comprise performance, while listening and reading contribute to the ability which makes performance possible. While this distinction is not incor-

rect, we should attempt to define performance not in terms of reception and production, but rather in terms of *activity*. Both reading and listening require the active participation of the student, and thus qualify as types of performance, if indeed activities are performance. The *intake* and *output* tree diagrams may now be brought together under one general category of *performance*:



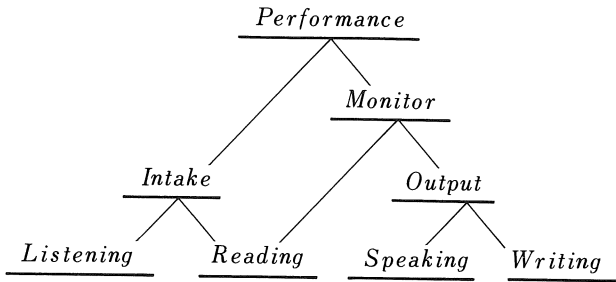
The question might be raised concerning the role of Acquisition and Learning in this performance model. In Krashen's model, both fluency and rules of thumb are said to increase performance. Since fluency is listed under Acquisition, and rules of thumb under Learning, it can be concluded that the Monitor model allows the performer to utilize both the Acquired and the Learned system. The Performance model also provides for both systems, but does not recognize a strict dichotomy between the two.

Although the problem of establishing a relationship between Acquisition, Learning, Intake and Output is difficult, one key may be found in the Monitor. Krashen says that rules of thumb "can increase accuracy in monitored performance to some extent. They will probably not make a great deal of difference in terms of communicative effectiveness... but they will give the performer's writing and prepared speech a more educated appearance." <sup>2)</sup>

Whether writing, or for that matter, speaking, can ever be completely free of the Monitor is a question that should be kept in the back of the

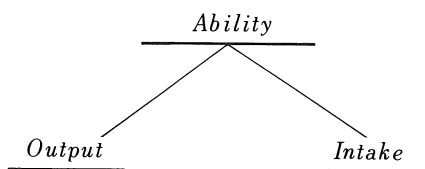
mind. It is undeniable, however, that both writing and speech — output — can be subject to the Monitor under certain conditions.

Krashen lists the conditions for Monitor use as focus on form, knowledge of rules, and availability of time. Both elements of Output meet all three conditions. As far as Intake is concerned, reading also meets the conditions for possible Monitor use. In listening, however, the student has no control over the element of time. Thus listening remains independent of the Monitor. In the Performance model, reading speaking and writing, but not listening, may be subject to the Monitor:

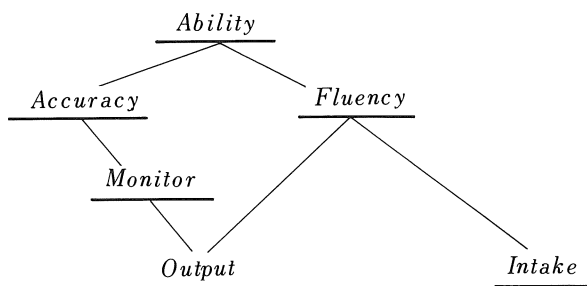


#### 4. THE ABILITY MODEL

The Monitor Theory places its emphasis on the process of language achievement, e.g., Acquisition and Learning. A practical model for a second-language program should also include the various elements of Competence which make possible Performance. Krashen regards Competence not as an innate characteristic, but as a series of achievements, which would be more accurately termed *Ability*. As illustrated in Krashen's tree diagram, Ability can be developed by increasing the amount of intake. Some skills may also be developed by increasing the amount of output. Thus output overlaps into the area of Ability in much the same way that intake overlaps into Performance:



The processes of Learning and Acquisition may increase second-language ability through Monitored or Monitor-free output. The former increases accuracy, while the latter increases fluency. In the Ability model, intake also leads to fluency. Of course reading, an intake type of Performance, may be performed accurately when Monitored, and fluently when Monitor-free. Krashen suggests that extensive reading be practiced as acceptable intake for Acquisition.<sup>3)</sup> If reading is Monitored, one would expect it to produce Learning. Intake for Acquisition would require fluent Performance in reading.



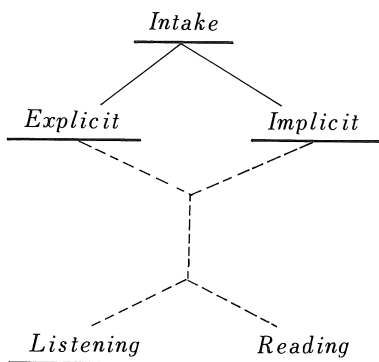
Krashen hypothesizes that intake is necessary for language Acquisition, but output is not. He cites some examples which show that delaying speech may not necessarily delay proficiency when active listening is provided.<sup>4)</sup> If comprehension precedes production, it is possible for the student to understand language without ever producing it. Understanding requires a significant correlation of thought processes, to the extent that proficiency (Ability) may be defined in terms of concept formation. This

raises the theoretical question of whether *thinking* in a second language constitutes Performance in the same capacity as listening, reading, speaking or writing. More importantly, it reaffirms listening as an endeavor which requires the active participation of the student.

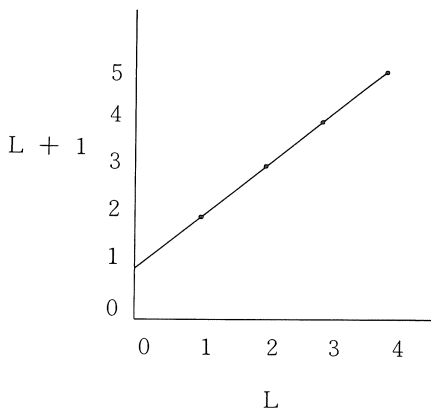
The Monitor model emphasizes intake for Acquisition. Active listening enables understanding of contextual input. This understanding enables the acquisition of syntax to progress from the present stage (i) to the next stage (i+1).<sup>51</sup> Active listening is therefore necessary for the second-language acquirer to make progress. The Practical model, however, allows the performer to utilize both active reading and listening as intake for understanding, thereby enabling progress (L becomes L+1) according to the Learning-Acquisition continuum.

The L+1 concept requires the creation of an appetite for learning. For example, a student who hears a word several times might begin to wonder what that word means. Finally he may understand the meaning by the context in which it is presented, and thereby construct a “rule of thumb” governing its use. “Rules of thumb” may remain part of the student’s *implicit* knowledge of his second language. Native speakers, as well, may know the meaning of a word which they have used or contacted through experience, yet they have never consulted a dictionary or had someone explain its meaning to them. The non-native speaker, however, may lack the linguistic and cultural sophistication to enable adequate understanding using only implicitly understood information, especially in the pre-competent stages. Implicit knowledge takes on greater relevance when it is finally made *explicit*, whether through consultation or a teacher’s explanation. The Practical second-language model therefore breaks down intake into its explicit and implicit subcomponents, which have an equal effect upon listening and reading:





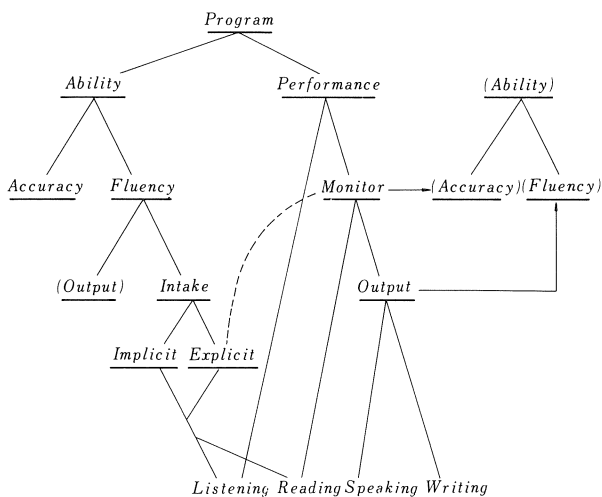
The Implicit-Explicit progression can be illustrated in graph form. In this graph, Learning is necessary before Acquisition can take place. In technical terms, this can be stated  $L=L+1$ .



In this formula the student's Ability (L) increases according to the amount of implicit information which has been made explicit. One important observation is that the student theoretically is able to perform (intake: listening) at  $L=0$ . In order for the student to advance beyond the zero-level ability, he must make some association between language and his experience, and he must have an explicit language-learning experience

which solidifies this association.

Whereas Krashen allows for some seepage between the Acquisition and Learning nodes of his program by way of error correction which increases fluency, while fluency in turn increases intake, the Performance-Ability model provides a comprehensive account of all aspects of the second-language experience, detailing the extent of interplay between them. Since intake is logically and psychologically linked to Ability, the Practical model will shift intake to the Ability node, although active reading and listening qualify as intake types of Performance. Even so explicit intake, located under the Ability node, has a direct influence upon the Monitor. The Monitor, in turn, influences accuracy, which is a feature of Ability. Output, which is a type of Performance, can also affect fluency, a factor of Ability. The entire program can be illustrated as follows. Since many of the various aspects are interdependent, the illustration is show in cyclical form, with parts of the Ability node repeated, to clarify its interaction with the Performance node.



## 5. PERFORMANCE, ABILITY, AND THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Although Krashen states that "the best activities are those that are natural, interesting, and understood,"<sup>6)</sup> and that the formal classroom might be a very good place for Acquisition, he maintains that "explicit information about the language...may be the least important contribution the second language classroom makes."<sup>7)</sup> This is in keeping with the emphasis upon intake for Acquisition which is presented in the Monitor model, but it also presents the problem of how the student can progress from stage "i" to "i+1" using only implicit information. The Performance-Ability model also allows that the classroom may be a good place for Acquisition, but for the primary reason that explicit information given by the teacher permits the student to progress to "L+1", thus enabling Acquisition to develop from Learning.

Since the Monitor Theory predicts three types of Monitor users, its model program leans heavily on Monitor-free activities, assuming that Monitor over-users can find enough "intake for learning" outside the classroom. While this may be true, the low-aptitude student faces insurmountable difficulties in trying to establish a structural base for his "Acquired" skills. For pre-competent speakers, activities that are natural and interesting may never be understood.

The Performance-Ability model, on the other hand, presents two contradictions to the Monitor Theory. First, the teacher must provide a reasonable amount of structural support for all students; second, the use of the Monitor is imperative for the teacher in all phases of instruction. Structural support contradicts the basic tenet of the Monitor Theory: that Acquisition is to be given preference to Learning. Monitor overuse by the

teacher is unnatural, however necessary it may be for understanding. By allowing such an unnatural, structural setting for language Learning and Acquisition, the Performance-Ability model Permits students from any learning style to benefit from a controlled agenda set forth by the teacher. There are no optional elements, and the theoretical and practical coexist in a meaningful equilibrium.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Krashen's model for a second-language teaching program attempts to relate theory and practice, and suggests specific techniques which may be used to provide for Acquisition. The model which Krashen proposes, however, does not balance Acquisition and Learning successfully, not to mention other factors in the second-language learning experience. The Performance-Ability model attempts to re-align many elements of the Monitor model, and by adding elements not found in Krashen's theory, to establish a balanced model for the second-language teaching program.

The Performance-Ability model recognizes Performance as an activity. The practical nature of Performance renders it an absolute necessity in any serious language-teaching program. This model also recognizes the theoretical importance of Ability, which benefits from an interchange of implicit and explicit input. Most importantly, Ability and Performance are considered to be interdependent, thus achieving a balance between theory and practice, Acquisition and Learning.

The second-language classroom can provide a medium for converting implicit information to explicit information, a process which will meet the expectations of students. The challenge for the classroom teacher is to make this conversion natural, interesting and understood. Just as art con-

ceals art, the mechanics of Learning must be tempered by the techniques which the teacher has at his disposal. The Performance-Ability model provides a practical alternative to the model presented in the Monitor Theory.

*NOTES*

1. Stephen D. Krashen, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), p.101.
2. *Ibid.*, p.115
3. *Ibid.*, p.107.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.107-8.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.102-3.
6. *Ibid.*, p.104.
7. *Ibid.*, p.116.