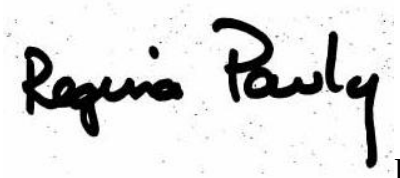
Second Language Acquisition Theory and

Left-Behind Student's English Teaching



Approved Date: May 13, 2009

Second Language Acquisition Theory and

Left-Behind Student's English Teaching

A Seminar Paper Research

Presented to

Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science

In

Education

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by

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2009

Abstract

English teaching is deeply impacted by the research on Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory. And there are five hypotheses, among them the Input hypothesis is the central part of an overall theory. From the 1980w on, the Chinese government has carried out the "Open-door" Policy and the economy flourished. According to this social develop a large amount of labor force that lived in rural or remote area in China rushed into urban area to seek jobs. As a result, this formed the vastest migration in Chinese history. Accompany this situation, another concerned phenomenon has occurred, the peasant labor parents and the children are separated into two places, the new migration can not solve the study question of these children. These kinds of children are called Left-Behind Children in China. Lack of study materials and poor living conditions cause some psychological problems, moral problems and study problems. How to teach English is a difficult question. And this article will analyze Second Language Acquisition Theory and explore the teaching method in Left-Behind Children. Although the theory can not be directly used in solving problems during teaching English, it can take effect on enlightenment and guidance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All kinds of practices in foreign language teaching are guided by some extent of language teaching concepts. The different opinions of people on the rules of foreign language teaching are reflected by different teaching concepts. In the traditional foreign language teaching and study, researchers focus on “how to teach”, but not on “how to learn”. They equate the foreign language teaching to other science of education. In contrast, others who view teaching as both science and art view the teacher as the crucial factor to success of foreign language learning.

From the 20th century until now, there is a common mind-set which is a compromised philosophy in foreign language teaching. Influenced by this mind-set and the development of linguistic, psychology and cognitive science, researchers undertake new angles to explore the study of language learning, especially in the point of foreign language teaching and learning. With the enlightenment of the cognitive psychology and the transformational-generative linguistic, language teachers and researchers have come to realize that the key to foreign language learner success depends on learners not on other factors. Foreign language teaching can establish a stable base only if researchers have comprehensive understanding on the learner’s themselves and the nature and procedure of language learning, and the study on the teaching strategies as well. Since the introduction of Second Language Acquisition theory into China, it has given positive influence and much important enlightenment

on Chinese foreign language teaching, especially the English Teaching.

From the 1980s on, the Chinese government has carried out the "Open-door" Policy and the economy flourished. This caused much of the labor force from the county has flowered into city. At the same time, the "Left-Behind People" phenomenon has occurred. The "Left-Behind Student" is a part in "Left-Behind People". This well known quote by the former Chinese Chairman Deng – "The children education is of greatest importance." As a result, the public pays more attention to issue of education than the "Left-Behind Student". Since the limitation of English Learning conditions in rural China ,such as lack of materials and qualified teachers, which prevents the English learning of the "Left-Behind Student". As an English teacher, based on my experience and enlightenment of the teaching process, I will analyzes the current situation of English education of "Left-Behind Student" and explore the teaching strategies.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is "What is the relationship between the Second Language Acquisition Theory and Left-Behind Student's English teaching?"

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, the library in SCUN, www.google.com and www.cnki.net, and other libraries through the inter-library log. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet and educational databases. Key search topics included "second language acquisition theory", "education of Left-Behind Student",

and “English Teaching Strategy”

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second Language Acquisition refers to the process by which people learn in conscious learning or an unconscious assimilation a second language under natural or guided conditions in addition to their native language. The term second language is used to describe the acquisition of any language after the acquisition of the mother tongue. The language to be learned is often referred to as the "target language" or "L2", compared to the first language, "L1". Second language acquisition may be abbreviated "SLA", or L2A, for "L2 acquisition". The term "language acquisition" became commonly used after American linguist Stephen Krashen contrasted it with formal and non-constructive "learning." However, "second language acquisition" or "SLA" has become established as the preferred term for this academic discipline. Though SLA is often viewed as part of applied linguistics, it is typically concerned with the language system and learning processes themselves, whereas applied linguistics may focus more on the experiences of the learner, particularly in the classroom. Additionally, SLA has mostly examined naturalistic acquisition, where learners acquire a language with little formal training or teaching. General speaking, there are two types of Second Language Acquisition. One type is day-to-day communication acquisition, and the other type is lectured acquisition. The former one refers to learners to learn a second language by themselves depending on

communicating with native language people. And the latter one refers to learners to learn a second language by lectures basing on teacher's teaching. The study of Second Language Acquisition contains lots of aspects, such as error analyses, acquisition order, language input, language transferring, personal differences, learning strategy, and class-room activity, etc. Second Language Acquisition Theory is based on Second Language Acquisition learning process and rules. Although the theory can not be directly used in solving problems during teaching English, it can take effect on enlightenment and guidance.

From 1970s on, the linguists have studied Second Language Acquisition on various aspects. Stephen D. Krashen as a professor worked in University of Southern California is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. Much of his recent research has involved the study of non-English and bilingual language acquisition. During the past 20 years, he has published well over 100 books and articles and has been invited to deliver over 300 lectures at universities throughout the United States and Canada. From mid 1970s, Krashen has worked in the theory of language acquisition. He indicated that any kind of scientism theory is composed by a series of hypothesis. Therefore, as a part of theoretical linguistics, Stephen D. Krashen's a Second Language Acquisition Theory was proposed, which has had a large impact in all areas of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. And this theory is composed by following five main hypotheses:

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis: This one is the beginner and the most

fundamental of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. It claims that we have two independent ways of developing language ability: acquired and learned. The "acquired system" or "acquisition" is the product of a subconscious, informal and natural process which is very similar to the process of learning one's first language.; while it is happening, we are nor aware it is happening. And the "learned system" or "learning" is a conscious, formal and definite process in which the learner only obtains L2 linguistic knowledge by understanding the grammatical rules and something like conscious memory and practice. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition' (Krashen,1992).

2. The Monitor Hypothesis: The Monitor hypothesis posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Normally, acquisition "initiates" our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Language is normally produced using our acquired linguistic competence. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been "produced" by the acquired system. Conscious learning has only one function: as a "Monitor" or editor. After we produce some language using the acquired system, we sometimes inspect it and use our learned system to correct errors. This can happen before we speak or write, or after (self-correction) (Krashen, 1982).
3. The Natural Order Hypothesis: This hypothesis was first proposed for second language acquisition by Corder (1967). It states that 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. It has been established, for example, that the –ing marker in English, the progressive, is acquired fairly early in first language acquisition, while the third person singular –s is acquired later (Krashen, 1992).

4. The Input Hypothesis: This hypothesis stands on the important position of Krashen's Theory. The input hypothesis is the central part of an overall theory of second language acquisition that consist of five hypotheses. The input hypothesis is Krashen's attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language. In other words, this hypothesis is Krashen's explanation of how second language acquisition takes place. So, the Input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. Krashen emphases the importance of "input" in many articles. Because it can be the key towards a crucial question: how to acquisition a language. It claims that humans acquire language in only one way-by understanding messages, or by receiving "comprehensible input". We progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structures at our next "stage"-structures that are a bit beyond our current level of competence (Krashen, 1985).
5. The Affective Filter hypothesis: The Affective Filter hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process. The concet of an Affective Filter w proposed by Dulay and Burt (1977). Research over the last decade has confirmed that a variety of affective variables relate to success in

second language acquisition, especially in three categories: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. “This hypothesis claims that affective variables do not impact language acquisition directly but prevent input from reaching what Chomsky has called the “language acquisition device,” the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition” (Krashen, 1992, p6). The affective filter is a hypothesized mental barrier which may be up or down. When the learner is poorly motivated and has a high level of anxiety, the filter is up, which will prevent the input from reaching the long-term memory (Krashen, 1982).

According to the Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition, one can conclude the following two points:1) acquisition is more important than learning; 2) in order to acquisition a second language, there must be two conditions. First of all, the supplier of language input must beyond the learner’s current level; secondly, there must be lower the psychological barrier.

Current Situation on Left-Behind Student

Left-Behind Student

Left-Behind Children refer to the children who live without parents in census register place, and their parents work in other place, especially in urban areas. The term “Left-Behind Children” was first appeared in the research about 1994. From 1994 to 2000, there are just only five reports and studies about the Left-Behind Children, but there was an increase after 2002. In 2004, the study paper about the Left-Behind Student has reached 30, and in 2005, there are more than 80 papers. (Lin

Peimiao & Yuan Ailing, 2007)

The living condition is a very important factor related to the second language acquisition. There are three kinds of living condition about Left-Behind Student. The first kind is children living with grandparents. Under this condition, children are spoiled and have more freedom. 74.34% of Left-Behind Students are this kind (Qing, 2007). The second kind is children living with relatives or parents' friends. In this condition, the trustees are busy with their work, or have to take care of their own children. As a result, they do not have enough time and energy to care about the Left-Behind Children. These students are 22.53% of Left-Behind Students (Qing, 2007). And the last kind is children living on their own. Children living in this condition are much less regulated, non-scrupled and non-indulged than other children. This kind can reach to 3.13% (Qing, 2007). So there are some problems that may be caused by the living condition. Their conditions can cause living problems, psychological problems, moral problems and the study problems. We will mainly talk about the study section.

The living problem, psychological problem and moral problem are the factors influencing the study of these children. At least three aspects are important. Firstly, the study motivation of partial Left-Behind Student is not definite or correct. Secondly, the study supervisor to partial Left-Behind Student is less powerful. Thirdly, the study condition of partial Left-Behind Student is poor. In the first case, there are four kinds of study motivation among students. 1) Lots of the Left-Behind Students study for their parents, and this amount is 38% (Qing, 2007). These students know that because

their parents work hard outside and they realize they are given a chance to study which is difficult. Especially for some poor families, the students try their best to study well and get the praise from their parents. 2) Some Left-Behind Students study for money and this rate is 29% (Qing, 2007). These kinds of students have heard from their parents' experience of the outside world. This concept, that is earning more and more money, is very popular. Furthermore, they think that if they go on to college or university it is the best way to enter into the urban areas. 3) Another 11% of Left-Behind Students study just a diploma (Qing, 2007). This kind of students do not desire anything, having a weak work ethic and do not enjoy being in school. They do not dream of anything or go in for anything. They go to school because that is what their parents asked them to do. 4) There is only 20% (Qing, 2007) of Left-Behind Students study to attain knowledge. And in the second case, the self-control ability of the Left-Behind Student, who is also a child, is weak, so there needs to be supervision either by the teacher at school and/or parents at home. However, Left-Behind Students receive supervision from their parents at home often inadequately. On the one hand, parents who do their work outside, seldom care about their children's study except connect with then through a few telephone calls and letters. On the other hand, the distinctness of the trustee in educational background, teaching concept, and behaviors has lead to different ways and effects of supervision. Some trustees pay attention to the Left-Behind Student, and the students study under good condition. However, some trustees are older; they do not have enough energy to supervise the Left-Behind Student. What's more, these older trustees are almost illiterate. They can not supervise

and help the Left-Behind Student study so are providing less quality. And the last case is the poor study condition. Although the Left-Behind Student can obtain more money than other students from their parents who work outside, the general situation still provides worry. The level of living condition about the Left-Behind Student is improved; they can buy more things to support their life, such as more books and stationery for study, but at the same time, the time spent on studying decrease naturally. They have to take care of themselves and do all the daily things by themselves, such as clothes washing, cooking and even do some farming. Furthermore, lack of supervision, the Left-Behind Student may be easy influenced by the outside society, especially some unhealthy aspects of society, and even to take part in it. For example, gambling, computer bar and electronic game room, etc. Under these conditions, the Left-Behind Student does not have enough time for study concentrated. The previously stated aspects commonly exist in rural and remote areas where the Left-Behind Student's live. (Qing Yonghong & Zhou Lin, 2007)

Current English Teaching Situation

English belongs to the Indo-European family and Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. Compared these two language in sound, vocabulary and grammar, etc. aspects, there are lots of distinctions. Thus, these distinctions bring great difficulties to Chinese people to learn English. Most of the Left-Behind Students live in rural and remote areas. And these areas are much unenlightened, because of the reasons about history, inconvenient transportation, undeveloped economy and cultural

background, etc. As a result, the general level of the Left-Behind Student's study is lower than the student who lives in inland, especially in English Learning. Therefore, there exist psychological barriers more or less among the most of the Left-Behind Students. It leads to the affective barriers in English learning.

Furthermore, the cultural difference is a very important factor to influence the Left-Behind Student's English acquisition and learning. Language and culture are two factors which can not be detached to each other. If learners want to learn a language, they must know the cultural background about the target language (English). Most of the Left-Behind Students live in rural and remote areas. The closed living condition of these students in the rural areas, they lack the cultural recognition of the target language (English) and they have a weak sensitivity towards the culture. So they often overlook the differences between English and their native language (Chinese), and they understand and apply the target language (English) according to the native language's rules (Chinese) unconsciously. Therefore, the cultural factor is one of the main barriers of the Left-Behind Student's English acquisition and learning.

The native language (first language) is one of the main factors to influence the foreign language acquisition and learning. The usage of the correct and fluent language must be with the help of the non-linguistic knowledge which sounds and language environment match to the language structure. Acquisition and learning a second language in learners' native language environment, students lack the target language environment and they do not have enough practice makes their learning more difficult. And lack of real language environment becomes another kind of main

barrier for foreign language acquisition and learning.

Where the Left-Behind Student lives , cause the students to face the severe challenge in English teaching. For example, some studies have published on the issues of how to teach and learn English which related to the Left-Behind Students. The English teaching methodology towards the Left-Behind Student follows the prevailing methodology, and changes into another one according to the popular tendency at that moment. As a result, the teaching method is the scenario method for a while, and then changes into the communicative method for a while, and later it will change into another teaching method. The teachers often ignore the real condition of the Left-Behind Students while they use these methodologies as the guide to teach English. They think that there is one magical method which can match any student in foreign language teaching and learning. As a matter of fact, my practice and experience have lead me to know that the English learning method various in English circumstances and in non-English circumstances; the English learning method is different between adults and minors; and the English learning method is distinct in different cultural backgrounds, and in different educational backgrounds, etc.

The quality and ability of the English teacher is another vital factor to influence the effect of English teaching. However, as a whole the quality of the Left-Behind Student’s English teachers is still wandering about in a lower level. And the level of the academic degree of these teachers is lower; the English skill is lower, too. A qualified English teacher should, in the first place, be capable in all four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Moreover, qualified English teachers should

be familiar with theories of linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy. For example how to teach the phonetic pronunciation of these English teachers is poor, especially because they are weak studying on English linguistic theories and English teaching theories. Fewer English teachers will spend time analyzing learners' needs or designing their own syllabi, nor will they collect suitable materials to create good English learning environment and activities. These deficiencies lead to bad results that the English teachers are hardly able to control the English teaching tendency in macroscopic and can not carry out an English teaching innovation in a higher position. And these bad results bring on influences about the development of English teaching at each educational level and the improvement of the English teaching level. In middle schools in urban areas in China, only 89.4% of junior middle school English teachers and 55% of senior middle school English teachers are professionally qualified. And the rate decreases dramatically in rural and remote areas, because of the poor living condition and lower income. Quite a number of English teachers in these areas know only some basic English grammar and vocabulary.

As to the limited English teachers in the areas of Left-behind Student, the English courses are limited. This situation handicaps the improvement of the Left-Behind Student's English level and hinders the further development of English education. At the same time is a shortage of the English auxiliary materials. There is not any English magazine or newspapers for them to have contacted with English except the English text book. Besides, the Left-Behind Student can not hear any English words except who their English teachers speak in class. In daily life, the language (English)

learners are seldom speaking English, listening to English, or using English; usually the English acquisition circumstance is unsatisfactory to acquisition and learning. As to the language learners, learning English is just limited to several classes per week. This limitation causes a problem— how to improve effectively in English linguistic ability and communicative ability (Liao Qifa, 2005).

Chapter 3

Enlightenment of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory to English Teaching in Areas of Left-Behind Student

According to Krashen's "The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis" and "The Monitor Hypothesis", the adults still contain the ability to absorb a language naturally. According to the same hypothesis theory, the Left-Behind Students also hold the ability to absorb a language. Acquisition and learning are two ways of second language acquisition in adults. If you want to obtain a second language, it mainly depends on acquisition. That is the reason why Krashen considered acquisition more important than learning. Students are speaking and writing with the practiced language, which can be considered as a form of modifying what you have acquired about speaking and writing. And the monitor can be worked when the acquisitioned person has had plenty of time and speech formation which transferred from mind, and knowing the proper rulers as well. Through learning one can obtain knowledge, but knowledge just can be carried on as the monitor when the language has being used. English acquisition is the dream of English teachers towards to their students, however, with the limitation of the areas where the Left-Behind Student lives, the Left-Behind Students seldom have opportunities to acquire English naturally. So the most forms of English teaching in these areas are based on English lectures. Also the class times of English lecture are less, and the interval between each English lecture is too long. Under the limitation situation and lack of the language acquisition

environment after English lecture, therefore, students easily forget the little knowledge that they have learned during the English lecture. Concerning this situation, the English teachers who work in the Left-Behind Student's areas should not only pay attention to English teaching in class, but also help students to learn English in formal rules, and should care about the English acquisition after class as well. Combination with in-class and after-class to create the English acquisition environment is also very important. And English teachers can organically combine three powers— school, family and society to create a proper environment to acquire and learn English. The English teachers can assign some homework to students to consolidate the knowledge that they have learned in class, the English teacher can take advantage of the multimedia (recorder, video or computer, etc.) to teach students English, except some oral and writing practices of homework. This multimedia can break through the limitation about the single information transformation in oral and writing English. At the same time, it can combine oral, letters, sound and visual aspects. The combination of these four aspects can actively express the target language and stimulate the students' senses. What's more, the multimedia usage brings the direct connection with the real English materials to students. And this way lets students accept more language stimulation and is good to create a nicer circumstance to acquire English. Thereby, the English teachers can provide some tapes and videotapes to students to practice oral and visual English after class, and organize with parents or trustees to supervise students; they also can recommend some excellent movies or some good English programs to study English unconsciously, and this provide a good condition

to study English to students and let them immerse in English environment as often as possible (They can learn not only some words or sentences from entertainment, but also the way of speaking and intonation).

"The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production."(Krashen, 1983, p5) According to the words of Krashen that the reasonable input and filter are the essential reasons for Second Language Acquisition. He considered that language acquisition is through comprehension and it means that it comes out from the capable ability of comprehensible input. Krashen once said "Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language—natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding."(Krashen, 1985, p8) Students first contact is with a lot of uncomplicated and understandable practical language, and they comprehend it in contextual. Thus, students can learn the sentence structural and grammar rules naturally. In the Input Hypothesis, Krashen considered that the capacity language acts (such as listening and reading) play an important role in language learning. Language acquisition will come out when students contact plenty of real and meaningful language materials; and be provided with ample quantity of comprehensible input. The Input Hypothesis is Krashen's

explanation of how second language acquisition takes place. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses along the ‘natural order’ when he/she receives second language ‘input’ that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. In Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, English teaching should pay more attention to language information input in various circumstances. Actually in the rural and remote areas where the Left-Behind Student lives, the obviously inadequate input has become a serious barrier to the promotion of comprehensive English skills. Therefore, in such areas, there is necessity to change the current situation, to create a good condition to language input.

In the Affective Filter Hypothesis, affective factor is divided into three parts by Krashen: 1) motivation: students can acquire more with more powerful; 2) self-confidence: students can acquire more with more self-confidence; 3) anxiety: lower anxiety is better to second language acquisition. In a word, learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to ‘raise’ the affective filter and form a ‘mental block’ that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. All in all, when the filter is ‘up’ it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place. Hence, there must be created a lower anxiety environment to get rid of psychological barriers and decrease the degree of affective filter, as a precondition to input and ensure the input effectiveness.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis focuses on the students' cognition level and makes a starting point by the students' current English skills, in order to provide language information input as much as possible, and achieve the facilitation of language acquisition. Aim at the Left-Behind Student, it very suitable to the rural and remote areas for this special group. Because language learning is a process of changing information and comprehension is the basis that students obtain information. If you depart from this factor talking about language input is impossible. Furthermore, English teachers should create a less powerful affective filter environment during the teaching practice and increase the reasonable input, to educate the English applied linguistics ability to the Left-Behind Students unconsciously. Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill (Krashen, 1982).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Although some linguists advanced some dissidences to Krashen's five hypotheses about Second Language Acquisition, there is no one who can deny the progress. Especially to the rural and remote areas where lack of English linguistics theory and English teaching theory, the English teachers explore the English teaching and learning with language input and output skills which are studied by the language learners. Besides, the study of English teaching theory and practice provide a new visual angle which can take effect on English teaching innovation in rural and remote areas. The teaching target of the English teachers contains not only comprehensible language input, but also to create an ease atmosphere to promote the learners' language output skills. According to the analysis, we can conclude that the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis which are mentioned in Krashen's hypothesis give enlightenment on bringing up the ability of language learning and promoting the English teaching theory in rural and remote areas. This can rapidly promote the average teaching skills and develop the self-study ability, and it can take a progressive effect on teaching practice. However, I also realize that it is a hard work and it may take more than ten years even more years to achieve the goals, because of the limitation in education in China.

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