

## Task Based Language Teaching and Hypotheses of Language Development

Mahan Attar

Assistant professor, Farhangian University, Iran

[attarm@cfu.ac.ir](mailto:attarm@cfu.ac.ir)

### Abstract

Around the mid-1980s, a number of hypotheses of language development were proposed. Although, there were some critics, from the first day that they were published, they remain popular and influential. They have had a major influence on Task – Based Teaching. Nunan (1989: 10) defines “task” as: “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.”

Krashen is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. He has formulated four hypotheses as the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis and the input hypothesis. He believes that language development does not require extensive use of rules and boring drills. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language and natural communication. This article tries to explain four theories and their implication for task-based teaching.

**Keywords:** language hypotheses, task, acquisition, monitor, interaction

### Introduction- What a task can do

One of the most important roles that a task can play is providing comprehensible input and promoting communicative interaction among the learners. The central role of interaction in language learning has been understood by interactionist to language acquisition, which proposes that interaction is a very effective way for learners to obtain data for language learning (see Gass, 1999; Long, 1996). Long (1996), in his interactive hypothesis claims that interactive tasks that promote learners' negotiation of meaning facilitate the development of language.

Researches have shown that there is a relationship between variation in task types and variation in the quantity and quality of negotiated interaction (e.g. Pica et al., 1989; Varonis and Gass, 1985).

Acquisition can be promoted by the comprehensible input and interaction. This is the major claim of the input hypothesis of Krashen (1985) and the interaction hypothesis of Swain (1985). There are some evidence which show the relationship between input frequency and output accuracy, (Lightbown, 1980; Ellis, 1994) and the use of formulaic expression which leads to the creative construction of rules and the acquisition of grammatical structure (Wong Fillmore, 1979)

Tasks are very effective in promoting language acquisition by means of comprehensible input and interaction. In the following sections, the focus is on four theories and their implication for task-based teaching.

### The acquisition – learning hypothesis

The acquisition – learning distinction is the most fundamental of all hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. The acquisition learning hypothesis claims that there are two psycholinguistic processes functioning in second language performance. The ‘acquired system’ and the ‘learned system’. The acquired system or acquisition is the product of subconscious process, of which the individual is not aware, similar to the process that drives first language acquisition. It is activated by meaningful interaction and communication in the target language and it can be acquired subconsciously by both adults and children. The emphasis is on the text of communication and not on the form. Learning about the language is through conscious process, rule memorization and formal instruction. New knowledge or language forms are represented consciously in the learner's mind, frequently in the form of language ‘rules’ and grammar. The process often involves error correction which results in conscious knowledge ‘about’ the language. A student who has memorized the rules of the language may be able to succeed on a standardized test of English language, but may not be able to speak or write correctly. What made Krashen's view controversial was that he insisted on two separate processes, that conscious learning could not ‘turn in to’ subconscious acquisition and the communicative competence could only be acquired through subconscious process.

The implication of the acquisition – learning hypothesis for task based language learning is that Task-based classes involve opportunities for subconscious acquisition rather than conscious learning. Learners are engaged in meaning focused, communicative tasks rather than form focused drills and exercises.

### The natural order hypothesis

This hypothesis is based on research findings (Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987) and Krashen presents it in the following way:

... this hypothesis ... states that we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some