

Second Language Acquisition – Quotes To Ponder

- [TPRS Questions & Answers](#)

Table Of Contents

1. Acquisition 2. Grammar 3. Compelling Input 4. Attitude 5. Output and Correction
6. Classroom Research 7. Foreign Language Benefits 8. Curriculum 9. Time 10. Reading

1. ACQUISITION

“Comprehensible input remains the foundation of all language acquisition.” — Lightbown and Spada, 2014

Chomsky via Jim Tripp:

“Knowledge of physics is conscious knowledge; the physicist can expound and articulate it and convey it to others. In contrast, the other two systems [grammar i.e. mental representation, and common sense] are quite unconscious for the most part and beyond the bounds of introspective report.

Furthermore, knowledge of physics is qualitatively distinct from the other two cognitive structures in the manner of its acquisition and development. Grammar and common sense are acquired by virtually everyone, effortlessly, rapidly, in a uniform manner, merely by living in a community under minimal conditions of interaction, exposure, and care.

There need be no explicit teaching or training, and when the latter does take place, it has only marginal effects on the final state achieved.”

—Noam Chomsky, Reflections on Language (1975)

“Language acquisition is a subconscious process; while it is happening we are not aware that it is happening, and the competence developed this way is stored in the brain subconsciously.” – Krashen

“We acquire language when we understand messages, when we understand what people tell us and when we understand what we read.” – Krashen

All cases of successful first and second language acquisition are characterized by the availability of Comprehensible Input. – Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 142

“(T)here is a consensus among second language researchers that input is an essential component of second language acquisition.” – VanPatten, 1996, p. 13

“Language is acoustical, not intellectual.” – Berty Segal

“In underdeveloped third world countries, where bilingualism or even multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception, a second (or third) language is ACQUIRED without any reference to conscious learning or to written material.” – Ellidokuzoglu, IJFLT 2008

“[N]ot only does instruction not alter the order of acquisition, neither does practice” – VanPatten, 2013

“SLA history is not 2,000 years old but almost as old as human history and that throughout this long period, people have acquired rather than learned L2s, considering the rather short history of linguistic sciences.”

– Ellidokuzoglu, IJFLT 2008

“[T]he idea that what you teach is what they learn, and when you teach it is when they learn it, is not just simplistic, it is wrong.” — Long, 1997.

“Even after puberty, the brain is elastic enough to internalize a second (or third) language basically in the same manner it picks up the first. However, since muscles regulating the articulators are somewhat fixed after a certain age, attaining a native-like accent may not be possible for some adults.” – Ellidokuzoglu, IJFLT 2008

“Learners [...] have demonstrated that acquisition of the tense and aspectual systems (e.g. the use of the preterit/passé composé and the imperfect) is piecemeal and unaffected by instructional intervention.” –VanPatten & Wong, 2003

“The amount of input necessary for L1 acquisition to take place is expressed in thousands of hours of auditory input. We shouldn’t blame our students for not being able to speak when we provide them with so little comprehensible input.” – Ellidokuzoglu, IJFLT 2008

“If someone cannot properly perform a rule that he consciously knows, his performance must be based on a non-conscious knowledge system.” – Ellidokuzoglu, IJFLT 2008

“Real language acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skills, even when conditions are perfect. 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, 1982

“Most important, the input hypothesis predicts that the classroom may be an excellent place for second language acquisition, at least up to the “intermediate” level. For beginners, the classroom can be much better than the outside world, since the outside usually provides the beginner with very little comprehensible input, especially for older acquirers (Wagner-Gough and Hatch, 1975). In the classroom, we can provide an hour a day of comprehensible input, which is probably much better than the outside can do for the beginner.”

– Krashen, 1982

“There is no need for deliberate memorization; rather, firm knowledge of grammatical rules (a feel for correctness) and a large vocabulary gradually emerge as language acquirers get more “comprehensible input,” aural or written language that is understood.” – Krashen

“Our goal in foreign language pedagogy is to bring students to the point where they are autonomous acquirers, prepared to continue to improve on their own. . . an “autonomous acquirer” has two characteristics:

- The autonomous acquirer has acquired enough of the second language so that at least some authentic input is comprehensible, enough to ensure progress and the ability to acquire still more language.
- The autonomous acquirer will understand the language acquisition process. The autonomous acquirer will know that progress comes from comprehensible input, not from grammar study and vocabulary lists, and will understand ways of making input more comprehensible (e.g. getting background information, avoiding obviously incomprehensible input).

This is, of course, the goal of all education – not to produce masters but to allow people to begin work in their profession and to continue to grow.” – Krashen, 2004

“In the end, acquisition is too complex to reduce to simple ideas. There are no shortcuts.” — Bill VanPatten

2. GRAMMAR

“[T]he brain processes syntactic information implicitly, in the absence of awareness.” (Batterink & Neville, 2013).

“We learn grammar from language, not language from grammar.”— Kato Lamb (from *Polyglot: How I Learn Languages* P.73 (4th ed.)). She attributes the line to the 19th-century publishers Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt (the same), whom she

paraphrases as having said “Man lernt Grammatik aus der Sprache, nicht Sprache aus der Grammatik.” (thanks Justin Slocum Bailey)

“Research shows that knowledge of grammar rules is very fragile and is rapidly forgotten.” – Krashen, 1993

“Studies have shown a weakening of the impact of learning after three months.” – Krashen, 2002

“Instruction does not appear to influence the order of development. No matter what order grammatical structures are presented and practiced in the classroom, learners will follow their own “built-in” syllabus.” – Ellis, 1984

“As is well-known, studies have shown that we acquire the grammar of a language in a predictable order, and this order cannot be broken.” – Krashen

“It is not at all the case that the more linguistically simple an item is, the earlier it is acquired. Some very “simple” rules may be among the last to be acquired.” – Krashen, 1982

“Teaching complex facts about the second language is not language teaching, but rather is “language appreciation” or linguistics.” – Krashen, 1982

“Consciously learned grammar is only available as a Monitor or an editor, and the constraints on Monitor use are severe: The user has to know the rule (see the complexity argument below), have time to apply the rule, and be thinking about correctness.” – Krashen

“No study has shown that consciously learned rules have an impact on Monitor-free tests over the long term.” – Krashen

“Research on the relationship between formal grammar instruction and performance on measures of writing ability is very consistent: There is no relationship between grammar study and writing.” – Krashen, 1984

“No empirical studies have provided good evidence that form-focused instruction helps learners acquire genuine knowledge of language. Moreover, many studies have found such instruction ineffective.” – John Truscott

“Second language editing actually depends far more on intuitions of well-formedness, coming from the unconscious language system, than on metalinguistic knowledge of points of grammar.” – John Truscott, 1996

“We see performers who have known a (late-acquired) rule for years, but who still fail to consistently “get it right” even after thousand of repetitions . . . On the other hand, we often

see performers who have acquired large amounts of a second language with no apparent conscious learning.” – Krashen, 1981

“People who do attempt to think about and utilize conscious rules during conversation run two risks. First, they tend to take too much time when it is their turn to speak, and have a hesitant style that is often difficult to listen to. Other overusers of the Monitor, in trying to avoid this, plan their next utterance while their conversational partner is talking. Their output may be accurate, but they all too often do not pay enough attention to what the other person is saying!” – Krashen, 1982

“No meaningful support has [ever] been provided for the position that grammar should be taught.” – Long (1997)

“Structured input works as well as structured input plus explanation” – Lightbown

“Syntax is acquired before morphology.” – Bill VanPatten. (He means that people get an intuitive gut feel for accuracy of things like word order and verb endings etc before they are able to produce them.)

3. COMPELLING INPUT

“Optimal input focuses the acquirer on the message and not on form. To go a step further, the best input is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may even ‘forget’ that the message is encoded in a foreign language.”

– Krashen, 1982

“Compelling input appears to eliminate the need for motivation, a conscious desire to improve. When you get compelling input, you acquire whether you are interested in improving or not.” – Krashen

“It is possible that compelling input is not just optimal: It may be the only way we truly acquire language.” – Krashen

4. ATTITUDE

“Savignon (1976) is correct when she says ‘Attitude is the single most important factor in second language learning.’ We might even suggest that one characteristic of the ideal second language class is one in which aptitude will not predict differences in student achievement (S. Sapon, personal communication), because efficient acquisition is taking place for all students.” – Krashen, 1981

“Thus, motivational and attitudinal considerations are prior to linguistic considerations. If the affective filter is ‘up’, no matter how beautifully the input is sequenced, no matter how meaningful and communicative the exercise is intended to be, little or no acquisition will take place.” – Krashen, 1981

“Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter—even if they understand the message, the input will not reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device.” – Krashen, 1982

“Studies have shown that several affective variables are related to success in language acquisition – anxiety (low anxiety is correlated with more success in language acquisition), self-esteem (more self-esteem is related to success in language acquisition), and motivation, with ‘integrative motivation,’ (a desire to belong to a certain group) related to long-term success in language acquisition (until membership is achieved), and ‘instrumental motivation’ (to accomplish a task) related to shorter term success (until the task is done).” – Krashen

“When asked what aspects of foreign language classes are the most anxiety- provoking, students put “talking” at the top of the list (Young, 1990).” – Krashen

“Finally, many classroom exercises, with their emphasis on correctness, often place the student ‘on the defensive’ (Stevick, 1976), entailing a heightened ‘affective filter’ (Dulay and Burt, 1977), which makes them less than ideal for language acquisition.” – Krashen, 1981

“Learning is most successful when it involves only a limited amount of stress, when students are relaxed and confident and enjoying their learning; but the use of correction encourages exactly the opposite condition.” – John Truscott

“the ‘elusive quality – strong motivation’ (Allen, J.P.B.,1973), combined with the right attitude towards the target language and its culture (Gardner,1972), sustained by appropriate intellectual and physical efforts taken by the learners themselves (Kaplan,1997) . . . can lead to successful acquisition of English as a foreign language.”

– D. Sankary

“Simply hearing a second language with understanding appears to be necessary but is not sufficient for acquisition to take place. The acquirer must not only understand the input but must also, in a sense, be ‘open’ to it.”– Krashen, 1981



5. OUTPUT AND CORRECTION

“Research conducted since the early 1990s has shown that traditional approaches to teaching grammar that involve the use of mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills do not foster acquisition in the way that practice [listening/reading] with structured input does.” —

VanPatten (2013)

“Peer-to-peer communication is the McDonalds of language teaching.” — Terry Waltz

“Students who learn language explicitly or through “skill building” are virtually unable to naturally produce language and rely on memorized rehearsed phrases in order to produce output. -Dr. Stephen Krashen

“More speaking or writing does not result in more language or literacy development, but more reading does” – Krashen

“[N]ot only does instruction not alter the order of acquisition, neither does practice”–

VanPatten, 2013

“Speaking has been found to be the most anxiety-provoking form of communication. (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987)” from Baker & MacIntyre (2000)

VanPatten (2013): “If input is so important, what does traditional practice do? [...] essentially very little, if anything. It does not help mental representation. It is not clear it helps skills.”

“Adding output and correction, in fact, has been shown to make progress less efficient, not more.” – Krashen

“More output does not result in more language acquisition. For example, students in classes that demand more writing do not acquire more of the language, and students of English as a foreign language who report more speaking outside of class do not do better on the TOEFL examination; those who read more outside of class, however, do better.” – Krashen

“Children are usually allowed to go through a ‘silent period’, during which they build up acquired competence through active listening. Several scholars have suggested that providing such a silent period for all performers in second language acquisition would be beneficial (see for example, Postovsky, 1977).” – Krashen, 1981

“Thus, feedback on errors was not only unhelpful, but also harmful to learners. Those who received comments on content plus correction were significantly inferior to those who received only comments on content.” – Truscott

“Correction was not only unhelpful in these studies but also actually hindered the learning process.” – Truscott

“Oral grammar correction is a bad idea.” – Truscott, IJFLT 2005

“more speaking or writing does not result in more language or literacy development, but more reading does” – Krashen

“Adding output and correction, in fact, has been shown to make progress less efficient, not more.” – Krashen

“More output does not result in more language acquisition. For example, students in classes that demand more writing do not acquire more of the language, and students of English as a foreign language who report more speaking outside of class do not do better on the TOEFL examination; those who read more outside of class, however, do better.” – Krashen

“Children are usually allowed to go through a ‘silent period’, during which they build up acquired competence through active listening. Several scholars have suggested that providing such a silent period for all performers in second language acquisition would be beneficial (see for example, Postovsky, 1977).” – Krashen, 1981

“Thus, feedback on errors was not only unhelpful, but also harmful to learners. Those who received comments on content plus correction were significantly inferior to those who received only comments on content.” – Truscott

“Correction was not only unhelpful in these studies but also actually hindered the learning process.” – Truscott

“Oral grammar correction is a bad idea.” – Truscott, IJFLT 2005

.....

6. CLASSROOM RESEARCH (TPRS, TPR and other C.I. methods)

“The most consistent advantages for TPRS are in developing students’ speaking, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. In all these areas, TPRS has consistently outperformed traditional teaching, and has at least equaled traditional teaching in every study.” – Karen Lichtman & Stephen Krashen

“TPRS should have advantages in retention over time, in comparison to traditional teaching. Compare TPRS students and traditional students on the same measure right before their summer break and right after their summer break.” – Karen Lichtman & Stephen Krashen

“TPR classes had only 20 hours of instruction while controls had 200 hours of instruction . . . All TPR classes, with the exception of grade five, outperformed controls after 100 hours, and the

adult class, after only 20 hours, outperformed controls after 200 hours. Similar results were obtained using a reading test.” – Krashen, 1982

“Her experimental group did not speak at all for the first 14 weeks but, instead, had to produce “active responses” that demonstrated comprehension. Also, they were not forced to speak for much of the next seven weeks. The experimental group was shown to be superior to the control group in listening comprehension and equal in speaking, despite the fact that the controls had more ‘practice’ in speaking.” –Krashen, 1982

“In both first and second language development, students who participate in classes that include in-school self-selected reading programs (known as sustained silent reading) typically outperform comparison students, especially when the duration of treatment is longer than an academic year.” – Krashen

“Extremely problematic for output hypotheses was the result that the amount of ‘extracurricular writing’ and ‘extracurricular speaking’ reported were negatively related to TOEFL performance.” – Krashen

“ . . . studies consistently find that older children acquire second languages faster than younger children . . . Older children, it has been argued, have an advantage because of their greater knowledge of the world, which makes input more comprehensible, as well as more advanced levels of literacy, which transfer to the second languages.”

– Witton-Davies

7. FOREIGN LANGUAGE BENEFITS

“Children who are considered ‘low achievers, and/or who have a disability,’ seem to benefit the most from foreign language study.” – Wang, Jackson, Mana, Liau, & Evans, 2010

“ . . . increasingly impressive bodies of research that document . . . the great number of cognitive, social, academic, problem-solving and practical benefits that have been observed in children who learn one or more languages in addition to their home language.” – Wang, Jackson, Mana, Liau, & Evans, 2010

“Research Findings: Second Language study:

- benefits academic progress in other subjects
- narrows achievement gaps
- benefits basic skills development
- benefits higher order, abstract and creative thinking
- (early) enriches and enhances cognitive development
- enhances a student’s sense of achievement

- helps students score higher on standardized tests
 - promotes cultural awareness and competency
 - improves chances of college acceptance, achievement and attainment
 - enhances career opportunities
 - benefits understanding and security in community and society” – NEA Research. (2007). “The Benefits of Second Language Study.”
-

8. CURRICULUM

“Given that verbs typically account for 20 percent of all words in a language, this may be a good strategy. Also, a focus on function words may be equally rewarding – 60 percent of speech in English is composed of a mere 50 function words.” – Davies

“Why should one do this? Nation (1990) has shown that the 4,000–5,000 most frequent words account for up to 95 percent of a written text and the 1,000 most frequent words account for 85 percent of speech.” – Davies

“We teach language best when we use it for what it was designed for: communication.” – Krashen, 1981

Below are the most-frequently used words per theme and also the extremely low-frequency words typically taught in that theme. The numbers in parentheses are the rank frequencies as calculated in Davies’ A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish (2006). Words are translated to English.

Colors (250) white (8225) orange
Animals (780) horse (4945) elephant
Body (150) hand (2407) ear
Food (787) meat (7602) carrot
Clothing (1710) suit (4427) t-shirt
Family (166) son (5071) niece
Days (1121) Sunday (3490) Tuesday
Months (1244) August (2574) September
Sports (2513) soccer (28388) hockey
Weather (989) heat (5493) breeze

There are more than 300 more frequent words than the numbers 6 through 10, and the numbers 13 through 19 are not in the most frequently used 1,000 Spanish words. In fact, only the numbers one and two are in the most-frequently used 100 words.

.....

9. TIME

“Our research shows that after 630 to 720 hours of instruction, or about midway through the fourth year of study, approximately 14% of students can read at the Intermediate-Mid level or better. Approximately 16% can write and 6% can speak at this level.” – Center for Applied Second Language Studies, 2010

The ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners (Swender & Duncan, 1998) propose elementary programs that meet from 3 to 5 days per week for no less than 30–40 minutes per class; middle school programs that meet daily for no less than 40–50 minutes.

10. READING

“Without a reading habit children simply do not have a chance.” – Krashen

“The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is read extensively in it.” – Christine Nuttal, 1996

“For maximum vocabulary development, learners need to read all along the way, since most vocabulary development in both L1 and L2 is incidental, meaning that vocabulary is learned as a by-product of some other intention (normally reading).” – VanPatten

“People acquiring a second language have the best chance for success through reading.” – Krashen

“The best way to improve in a foreign language is to do a great deal of comprehensible, interesting reading. The case for self-selected reading for pleasure is overwhelming.” – Mason

“What is probably the best-supported way of improving language competence is rarely mentioned in the professional literature: wide recreational reading, or ‘free voluntary reading.’” – Witton-Davies

“Those who read more, write better” – Krashen

“Free voluntary reading may be the most powerful tool we have in language education. In fact, it appears to be too good to be true. It is an effective way of increasing literacy and language

development, with a strong impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.” – Krashen

“Incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth.” –Nagy & Herdman

“The second language student needs massive amounts of comprehensible, interesting reading material, enough so that he can read for pleasure and/or interest for an hour an evening, if he wants to, for several months.” –Krashen

“Picking up word meanings by reading is 10 times faster than intensive vocabulary instruction.” – Krashen

“Free reading is also an excellent source of knowledge: those who read more, know more.” – Krashen

“There is overwhelming evidence for recreational reading as a means of increasing second-language competence. In fact, it is now perhaps the most thoroughly investigated and best-supported technique we have in the field of second-language pedagogy.” – Krashen

“Many studies confirm that those who read more write better . . . it is reading, not instruction, that helps us develop a good writing style.” – Krashen, IJFLT 2005

“The success of pleasure reading thus depends on the reader’s willingness to find material at his level and reject material that is beyond him.” – Krashen, 1982

“Hirsch and Nation (1992) claim that in order to reach text comprehension, readers and listeners need to be familiar with 85% of the words in a text.” – Thornber

“the source of good writing style, the vocabulary, syntax and discourse structure of the written language, is reading.” – Lee & Hsu

“Students who had a pleasure reading habit easily outperformed those who were not readers on a test of grammar and on a test of reading and writing.” – Ponniah, IJFLT 2008