Does the Monitor Theory Provide an Adequate Model for the Foreign Language Classroom?

(1) The Learning – Acquisition Distinction

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Stephen Krashen (1981) defines the Monitor as the channel by which conscious learning is available to the second language learner. In order to use the Monitor, the learner must have time, be focused on form, and possess a knowledge of grammatical rules. In contrast to the Monitor user is the learner who seems to have a natural ability to communicate in the second language: his speech is fast and spontaneous, revealing an orientation towards the affective, rather than the cognitive domain. This paper examines aspects of the Monitor Theory in terms of its practical application in the formal classroom. Whereas students in a second-language setting have the advantage of absorbing natural input outside of the classroom, students in a foreign-language setting must rely on instructional materials or homework assignments for most of their input. Thus “acquisition” is much more likely to occur in an instructional setting in which the target language is widely spoken outside of the classroom. However, the Monitor Theory can contribute greatly to the foreign-language classroom, inasmuch as the instructor optimizes input for acquisition.

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