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

2. The Utterance Initiator

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Stephen Krashen (1981) claims that edited second language output is generally viewed as a hindrance to natural communication. This paper examines the cognitive origins of language in order to determine whether Krashen’s claims concerning the Monitor are valid. Several schools of thought are considered, starting with B.F. Skinner’s behaviorism, Zellig Harris’s concept of transformations, and Noam Chomsky’s deep structure-surface structure distinction. The discussion then moves on to the relation of form to meaning, again contrasting the ideas of Skinner, Harris, and Chomsky. Departing from any of these views, Krashen insists that second language utterances must originate with the “acquired system,” and when this is lacking, the learner falls back upon his native language surface structure. In the formal classroom, efforts must be made to move from drills and exercises to meaningful communication, if the “acquired system” is to be developed. Since the Utterance Initiator depends on competence, both acquisition and learning are necessary for communication to take place. Individual variations in the degree of use of the Monitor can be put to the teacher’s advantage by optimizing the interplay between the two systems.

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