

# Form-Focused Instruction and the Natural Order Hypothesis

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## 1. Introduction

When learning languages, students carry around dictionaries, not grammar books.<sup>1)</sup>

Early this year a close acquaintance of mine was assigned by a major Korean textbook publisher to help revise one of their popular English grammar books.<sup>2)</sup> So she -- and with some help from me -- put her nose to the grammar grindstone, and e-mailed to the company the following revision of a dialog containing the patterns "(much) ... -er / more ... adj.":

*... English Grammar Text*

Sally I'm thinking of getting a pet. What do you recommend?  
Jim Well, my uncle has five cute dogs. Four are Saint Bernards and the other is a Chihuahua. By the way, the Chihuahua is friendlier and more intelligent than the other dogs.  
Sally Oh, yeah? I'll bet it costs a fortune to feed them!  
Jim No, actually the Saint Bernards eat less because they're smaller than the Chihuahua.  
Sally Hey, wait just a minute! A Saint Bernard is much bigger than a Chihuahua.  
Jim Usually, but my uncle's Saint Bernards are much younger -- they're still puppies.

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- 1) Remark made by one of Stephen D. Krashen's students at a USC-UCLA Second Language Acquisition Meeting. "I do not remember which student said it, and I hope he or she forgives me for failing to give him or her full credit for this interesting observation" (Krashen 1979: 163).
- 2) Make that very popular English grammar books -- so far over 300,000 copies of them have been sold in Korea! The textbook is targeted to middle school and "advanced" elementary students.

Admittedly nothing to write home about -- after all, it was just a sample -- but certainly it was an improvement over the stilted dialogue contained in the first edition. Early the next day a member of the publisher's staff e-mailed us in Korean a stern admonition, the gist of which follows:

You didn't follow directions; you introduced certain grammatical forms<sup>3)</sup> much too early; in short, you violated the fixed grammatical sequence as stipulated on the "ESL Contents List" (see Fig. 1, below); you must start over again!

level & contents pages	A		C		
	1. Personal Pronoun 2. Be verbs 3. Action verbs 4. Present Progressive		1. Comparison 2. Exclamatory / Imperative Sentences 3. To Infinitive + Verbal Noun		
1-10	Preview			Review B	
11-20	1, 2 singular	I am (You are)~	1. Com- parison	Comparison	-er, -r / more
21-30	3 singular	He (She, It)~		Superlative	the + -est / the most ...
31-40	1, 2, 3 singular	We (You, They) are ~		Other Comparisons	as ... as / -er and -er
41-50	Story1			Story 1	
51-60	Be verbs	Negative / Wh-question	No, I'm not. / What, Where ?	2. Exclamatory / Imperative	
61-70		Possessive case	your / my / her / his	3. To Infinitive	Object
71-80	There + be	There is (are)	Subject		It / to Infinitive It / for / of ~ to~
81-90	Review 1	Be verbs	Story 2		
91-100	Story 2				

Fig. 1 ESL Contents List

3) Specifically, Unit C / 1. Comparisons / Other Comparisons: 21-40. The comparative pattern in the sample above was grammatically "out of sequence," according to the publisher's staff.

This Procrustean "ESL Contents List" would prove to be a major bone of contention between the reviser and the textbook publisher, a bureaucratic kingdom where Grammar-Translation / Audiolingual Methods still reign supreme. The staff there insisted that English grammatical patterns must be learned sequentially, "easy patterns" (Unit A) first, "difficult patterns" (Unit C) later. From the standpoint of current research findings in Second Language Learning/Acquisition, such an insistence is pedagogically disputable, to say the least. In this essay I will examine some of the theories of second language acquisition that have cast doubt on the teachability of grammar, of form-focused instruction, and I will then attempt to apply this information to a specific pedagogical issue concerning the Korean TEFL environment. Namely, I will attempt to address the question of whether or not the teaching of grammatical patterns sequentially, as epitomized by the "ESL Contents List" (Fig. 1, above),<sup>4)</sup> can be justified pedagogically. Finally, I will examine and evaluate briefly some alternative methods of form-focused instruction, specifically Consciousness-raising and Data-Driven Learning. Therefore, I will discuss at various points in this essay

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4) This list is an "adaptation" of material contained in another very popular series of grammar textbooks written by a Korean instructor named Song Song-moon. It is now an open secret in Korea that he, in turn, "adapted" his material from various Japanese English grammar textbooks written in the 1950s. Song's grammar books have become veritable bibles among English teachers in Korea: the close acquaintance of mine mentioned above still uses them when she teaches grammar to middle school and high school students. The majority of Korean English teachers still haven't been weaned from Grammar-Translation Methods, though recently the Korean government has launched a concerted and expensive campaign to introduce gradually into Korean classrooms a more communicative or at least a more eclectic approach to English language teaching and learning.

1. some theories of second language learning <sup>5)</sup> that have cast doubt on the teachability of grammar (arguing that learning does not become acquisition, or that the learner's syllabus imposes constraints on what can be taught and learned at a given time); and	specifically, Krashen's Monitor Theory / the Natural Order Hypothesis (1981, 1982, 1985), buttressed by the English Morpheme Studies
2. the role, if any, grammar books which aim at explicit teaching have in the classroom.	specifically, the role the "popular" English grammar books mentioned above have in L2 classrooms in the Korean educational environment.

## 2. Theories of Second Language Acquisition

There is nothing as practical as a good theory.<sup>6)</sup>

SLA, the systematic study of how a person acquires a second language, is still a relatively young discipline. The approximate beginning could perhaps be marked by two articles in *IRAL*: Corder's (1967), "The Significance of Learners' Errors," and Selinker's (1972) "Interlanguage." Since then a "multiplicity and heterogeneity of theories" have appeared -- "by recent count, there are between 40 and 60 theories of SLA" (Long 1993: 225-6).<sup>7)</sup> Yet this riotous diversity is perhaps another indication that though SLA is "a true conundrum" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 2), "... though it may simply be too difficult and too complex to be

5) Space limitations prevent me from discussing two other interesting and relevant theories -- viz., 1) Pienemann's Teachability / Learnability Hypothesis (1985, 1989), which "predicts that instruction will only succeed in teaching a learner a new developmental structure if the learner is 'ready' to acquire it"; and 2) Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith's Pedagogical Grammar Hypothesis, which predicts that form-focused instruction may "under certain conditions significantly increase the rate of acquisition over and above the rate expected from learners acquiring that language under natural circumstances where attention to form may be minimal and sporadic" (Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1985: 275).

6) This ubiquitous quote in SLA literature has been attributed to several people, most frequently Bertrand Russell.

7) Kevin Gregg (1990) insists this figure should represent a multitude of theories in SLA.

dealt with a single theory"<sup>8</sup>) (Gregg 1984: 79), this very complexity has paradoxically not inhibited many scholars from trying their hand at concocting a theory of second language acquisition. And now things have gotten so chaotic that "there is uncertainty as to whether there are many theories of SLA or none" at all (Beretta 1993: 221).

Nunan, thus, laments that language teaching is now "at the mercy of numerous applied linguists who have foisted their infrequently tested or inadequately tested theories on the profession" (Nunan 1988: 173). Here in Korea, the profusion of esoteric SLA theories is looked upon with disfavor among many Korean scholars who hold university teaching positions in TEFL/TESL, and who have received their doctorates from (mostly) U.S. universities. Perceptible now is a growing skepticism and even irritation among these Korean scholars regarding the advisability of applying *in toto* SLA theories to the Korean educational environment. At an international conference held on "Efforts of Asian Countries to Enhance ESL Learners' Communicative Competence" at this college, Soong Sil University, in October, 1996, one of the participants, Prof. Yongjae Paul Choe of Dongguk University, said

... how futile the blind adoption of foreign ideas and techniques is. No imported theories or methods have been fully successful in Korean classrooms simply because their cultural backgrounds have not been compatible with Korean culture. For example, the reticence of students gets in the way of new ideas and techniques (Choe, Yongjae 1997:86).

Yet although, to quote Nunan, we are "at the mercy of numerous applied linguists" and their "infrequently tested or inadequately tested theories," and although, in the eyes of many Korean scholars, none of these theories has proven "fully successful in Korean classrooms," in order to address the specific issue mentioned

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8) Even Krashen, not known to be bashful about advancing theoretical positions, once wrote, "none of us are sure about anything in L2 research" (1979: 151).

above -- viz., should grammar rules in grammar books be taught sequentially, nay, should grammar be taught in classrooms, period -- we will need a "good theory" to work with.

In the fecund field of SLA theories, how does one separate the wheat from the chaff? How does one, to mix metaphors, distinguish the flowers from the noxious weeds? One could adopt Darden's (1991) assessment strategy based on theory change in the history of genetics (Long 1993: 235-23).<sup>9)</sup> For example, three of her criteria -- clarity, simplicity, and fruitfulness -- are conspicuous in Krashen's Theory, a theory that will be examined in relative detail, below. On the other hand, perhaps we should take a more casual approach and adopt Schumann's proposal (1983)<sup>10)</sup> -- SLA theories should be evaluated aesthetically, "like exhibits in an art gallery, neither true nor false, but more or less pleasing to the eye." Beauty, as the cliché goes, is in the eye of the beholder. Some people's aesthetic tastes incline to the cubistic -- say, Bialystok's Analysis / Automaticity Model<sup>11)</sup> or

9) Regarding genetics and odd theories of grammar acquisition, a few years ago Myrna Gopnik of Montreal's McGill University claimed there is a single dominant gene that controls the ability to learn grammar. She studied a family whose members don't know to add "-ed" for the past tense of verbs or "-s" for plural nouns. In all other ways the members are intellectually normal. But, she said, "Language is a problem they solve by sheer wit." She said people lacking the grammar gene "are worn out just by talking" because they must continually struggle with verb tense and noun plurals. "The hardest part for them is people thinking that they are stupid," Gopnik said. "They are not. You have to think of them as people without a native language." Gopnik reported on her research at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. People with a normal grammar gene naturally learn language rules that make verbs past tense or turn nouns into plurals, Gopnik said. People lacking the gene, however, must learn through another intellectual process how to change verbs and nouns. "They will say 'today I walk, yesterday I ...' and they don't know how to finish," said Gopnik. "For some reason they don't build the general rules of language" such as adding the "-ed" to make walk the past tense. (Condensed from Paul Recer, AP Science Writer, "Gene Controls Learning Of Grammar, Researchers Say," 10 Feb. 1992.)

10) Perhaps this proposal was advanced tongue-in-cheek. According to Long (1993: 243), Schumann eventually renounced his earlier (1983) relativist stance.

11) Yet even she has lamented: "I have been a sporadic attendant at SLA conferences for almost 20 years, yet a large part of what I hear is incomprehensible. In fact, the situation is getting worse due to the increasingly technical language and hair-splitting debates about details of theories that have not even been described" (Bialystok 1995: 1).

McLaughlin's Attention-Processing Model; others appear to slant more toward the, say, surrealistic -- Stephen D. Krashen's Monitor Theory,<sup>12)</sup> perhaps the most lucid, simple, and explanatory<sup>13)</sup> SLA theory of all time.

Amid this theoretical chaos and with considerable trepidation this writer will attempt to begin addressing the assigned task by selecting out of the multitude of SLA theories the one that "casts the most doubt on the teachability of grammar."

## 2.1 Krashen's Monitor Theory

Krashen's theory ... is not a theory.<sup>14)</sup>

Stephen D. Krashen and his Monitor Theory<sup>15)</sup> has been and still is the target of incessant attack<sup>16)</sup>, running the gamut from the relatively bland -- "Krashen's theory fails at every juncture..." (McLaughlin 1987: 56), to the acerbic --

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12) Key elements in Stephen Krashen's Monitor Theory echo Harold E. Palmer's (1877-1949) concepts of "subconscious assimilation" and the spontaneous/studial distinction (Krashen's acquisition/learning dichotomy). Palmer's linguistic innovations are explicated in his first major work, *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages*, 1917/68 [republished by OUP] and in *The Principles of Language-Study*, 1921/64 [republished by OUP] (Howatt 1984: 241, 286). Palmer wrote: "we learn without knowing what we are learning (1921:44), and "we form our sentences in unconscious obedience to some rules unknown to us (1921: 5, quoted in Prabhu 1987: 14-15). Palmer (1917, quoted in Prabhu 1987: 84) was convinced that formal grammar should be learnt after the language itself was learnt, and never before. This echoes John Locke's assertion in 1693: "If grammar is taught at any time, it must be to one who can speak the language already" (quoted in Brumfit 1984: 40).

13) I.e., "the lucidity, simplicity, and explanatory power of Krashen's theory" (Ellis 1990a: 57).

14) Gregg (1994: 49).

15) Krashen's Monitor Model has "evolved continuously over some ten years." It probably would make better sense to use Ellis' term, the "Extended Monitor Theory," which includes two additional concepts: "Inter-Stage Fluctuation" and "The Output Filter" (1994: 145); nevertheless, to avoid confusion I will retain the phrase Monitor Theory in this paper.

16) "Krashen Bashin" used to be "a favorite pastime at conferences and in journals dealing with second-language research" (McLaughlin 1987: 19). But he is still the target of castigation. He was labeled "dead meat" by several participants (Gregg, Eubank, and others) during a particularly astringent exchange about Krashen and his SLA hypotheses that erupted recently on the Internet Newsgroup "bit.listserv.slart-1." See Appendix A for samples.

"Krashen's 'theory' is just so much balloon juice" (Gregg 1997/02/21 bit.listserv.slart-1). To Kevin Gregg, one of Krashen's most persistent and vociferous critics, Krashen's theory is a bad theory because it is a "waste of time" -- it not only a) "discourages more fruitful research," it b) "misleads the unwary into thinking that questions have been answered and problems solved that in fact remain unanswered and unsolved" (Gregg 1984: 95).

His second language acquisition theory is not a coherent theory; it is indeed incoherent to the point that it seems inappropriate to apply the word "theory" to it (Gregg 1984: 94).

Krashen claims to have developed a comprehensive theory of second language acquisition; I claim he has done no such thing. We can't both be right, and it should be of some interest to settle the matter, especially since Krashen's "theory" currently has no rival in terms either of comprehensiveness or of popularity (Gregg 1994: 37).

But as difficult as it perhaps is for Gregg to admit, Krashen's theory is still

... probably the most ambitious and most influential attempt in recent years to construct an overall theory of second language acquisition (Gregg 1984: 79).

After several months of canvassing the literature by and about Krashen and his Monitor Theory, I found that there are fewer applied linguists entertaining complimentary words about Krashen and his theories than paleontologists devoted to creationism.<sup>17)</sup> Nonetheless, the Monitor Theory has some very specific things to say about the role of form-focused instruction in the EFL/ESL classroom that are pertinent to the issue of the suitability of grammar books and explicit grammar teaching in EFL classrooms and in particular to the grammar books my acquaintance is currently revising.

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17) Among SLA scholars I did find one lonely soul: Zobl, who wrote recently, "... the epistemological theory [Krashen] proposed merits a more sympathetic reappraisal," and "In sum, Krashen's ideas deserve to be developed further and the debate they have inspired will hopefully continue" (1995: 35, 51).



### Excursus 1

On the Internet I did find one defiant soul, a certain Hasanbey Ellidokuzoglu, an English language teacher in the Turkish Military Academy, who, in his own words, in 1988 became "obsessed with Krashen-related literature."

**From: Hasanbey Ellidokuzoglu**

**Date: 1997/02/19**

My first acquaintance with Krashen theory dates back to 1988, and from then on I became obsessed with Krashen-related literature including many of the articles written against him (the ones in *Beyond the Monitor Model*, for instance). There are undoubtedly many to-the-point arguments raised against his theory, which requires some revisions in his Monitor.

I have scanned hundreds of messages gathered during my one-month absence and noticed dozens of messages about the so-called "dead" Krashen. I really wonder if there is any other person in our field who has been sentenced to death but is "MORE alive" than anyone else. Believe it or not, he will even be more popular. We have a saying in Turkish "You cannot cover the sun with mud."

**From: Hasanbey Ellidokuzoglu**

**Date: 1997/02/19**

There are two interesting studies by Ellis and Piennemann (both published in 1989, one in SSLA the other in AL) showing that even deliberate attempts of reversing the natural order is not effective. These researchers tried to change the order by reversing the order during the treatment and emphasizing the late acquired items the most. But again the learners followed their built-in syllabus confirming Krashen's non-interface position. I would like to finish by asking those opponents of Krashen to account for the inalterability of the natural order.

Now before we can try to examine the "zero option" and the alleged "inalterability of the natural order" mentioned by Mr. Ellidokuzoglu, above, I would like, hopefully without taxing the reader's patience, to elaborate somewhat more on the two reasons, aside from its aesthetic appeal, I have chosen to dwell somewhat on Krashen's theory. First, Krashen is a fascinating personality in his own right, a "social phenomenon in the language teaching world" (Brumfit 1994: 263) --

First, he is a scholar of great industry; few people have cited so many pertinent references in support of their hypotheses or worked so energetically to explore the implications of academic work for a language teaching theory. Second, he writes clearly, so many teachers can find his work accessible. Third, he has refused to isolate himself from practical teaching concerns; indeed he has been willing to work among and with teachers more extensively than many of his peers. Fourth, he is intellectually ambitious:<sup>18)</sup> the undertaking to produce a coherent model of second language learning indicates a wish to be evaluated only by the highest standards of scholarship (Brumfit 1994: 264).

Second, as mentioned above, "... he writes clearly, so many teachers ... find his work accessible" (Brumfit 1994: 264) and intuitive --

Perhaps Krashen's greatest mistake has been to formulate his suggestions clearly, and to state his hypotheses explicitly for it is precisely this clarity which has rendered them so susceptible to attack (Lewis 1993: 22).

Most teachers and researchers see in the creative construction theories much which is intuitively appealing (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 29).

Being clearly presented by Krashen both in writing and at conferences, and not requiring of the consumer any daunting technical expertise in linguistics or psychology, the [Monitor Theory] was easily understood, even by the non-specialist, a virtue which had the side-effect, however, of creating instant experts who had not actually read the related research, much less conducted any themselves, but now asserted their own views (Larson-Freeman and Long 1991: 245).

### **Sharon Widmayer**

**Date: 1995/05/24**

In my master's degree classes, I was always struck with the fact that the L2 teachers in the classes loved Krashen while those who were more interested in research were much less interested in what Krashen's theories had to say. I think

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18) As an illustration of Krashen's mental acuity, hypothesis seem to pop into his head faster than mushrooms after a rainstorm. Take his fascinating description of the Din Theory and the Din Hypothesis: his experience in 1980, at the Goethe Institute in New York where he was invited to participate in an SLA workshop / symposium. The problem was he would have to use German. After experiencing a flood of German language input, on the plane back home he "felt the Din rattling in my brain" (Krashen 1985: 38-40).

Krashen's work is particularly relevant for adults learning a 2nd language, particularly his theory on the "monitor."

**Andrea Nelson**

**Date: 1995/06/05**

I want to support the remarks made by Sharon Shelly in her most recent entry on this list. The "trickle down" theory of language teaching methodology, unfortunately, has meant that the drips of the big theory (Krashen's) have washed over fellow second language researchers, foreign language teachers, and students alike like a soothing rain. I think Krashen's theory is attractive because it seems to make so much intuitive sense. But there was a time when we thought that the earth was flat and that the earth was center of the solar system or universe or whatever....

To get back to teaching. I think the tenets of Krashen's theory have trickled down into the pedagogical soil very deeply and have become part of the water table of much current pedagogical practice. As a friend remarked to me long ago, even the buzzwords of Krashen's theories have saturated the pedagogical consciousness: affective filter, naturalness in approach, and so forth. This is kind of like a "natural approach orthodoxy." Teachers may be reluctant to write a verb conjugation on the board (I was), or to explain in the L1 the uses of the genitive case. Those of use who teach languages with highly inflected systems (mine: Russian) are torn.

Krashen's theory has achieved considerable popularity among second-language teachers in the United States. This is due in large measure to his ability to package his ideas in a way that makes them readily understandable to practitioners. On the other hand, the theory has been seriously criticized on various grounds by second-language researchers and theorists.... Indeed, 'Krashen-bashin' has become a favorite pastime at conferences and in journals dealing with second-language research (McLaughlin 1987: 19).

Krashen's theories have had wide appeal to teachers who cry for something simple and concrete on which to base their methodology.... But in their oversimplicity, the claims have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, oddly enough, I feel we owe a debt of gratitude to Krashen for his bold, if brash, insights (Brown 1994:282).

... one of the reasons for Krashen's popularity among language teachers is that he has been able to package his ideas in a manner that is accessible to practitioners. Moreover, he has captured the *Zeitgeist*—the movement in the field away from grammar-based to communicatively oriented language instruction. (McLaughlin 1987: 162).

... for many teachers, he is the first 'applied linguist' who has not only made theoretical ideas accessible but also shown how these ideas might be relevant to

their practical problems (Littlewood 1994: 204).

Krashen's ideas are both stimulating and frustrating. They raise expectations by suggesting simple, plausible explanations for phenomena that many L2 users recognize; they provide immediate connections with the classroom (Cook 1993: 65).

Krashen is an extreme example, and in many ways the most academically 'respectable' example, of a general tendency to look for simple solutions to complex problems by attaching language teaching to the work of a particular publicist who is either a scholar or a successful teacher (Brumfit 1994: 263).

## 2.2 The Zero Option

Some of it does.<sup>19)</sup>

Form-focused instruction -- grammar! Should language teachers teach it? Can language learners learn it? These questions arise "because some teachers, perhaps influenced by applied linguists such as Krashen (1982)..., have begun to question the value of teaching grammar" in the classroom (Ellis 1997: 71). Many SLA scholars are thus disturbed by the "anti-pedagogical implications" (Marton 1994: 57) of Krashen's advocacy of the "zero option."<sup>20)</sup>

19) Ellis' response to the question: to what extent does research (cited below) support the zero option? (1994: 653).

20) The "zero option" is also advocated by the educator N.S. Prabhu (1987), founder of the (defunct) Bangalore / Madras Communicational Teaching Project (CTP). The assumption of the Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) in India (Prabhu 1987): learners acquire grammar subconsciously when their attention is focused on communicating in meaning-focused tasks (Ellis 1997: 29) --

"... language ability develops in direct relation to communicational effort (and that language structure as content is unhelpful in language teaching), the teaching procedures which evolved on the project crucially involve a preoccupation with meaning-content and activities in which teachers act as teachers and learners act as learners in the way they do in the rest of the school's work. It will be claimed that both the focus on meaning-content and teacher-directed activity are advantageous from the point of view of the perception of learning in question (Prabhu 1987: 5).

Actually this "anti-grammar" perspective is hardly modern. Krashen was not the first scholar, of course, to question the role of grammar in language learning. In 1622, Joseph Webbe, in his treatise *An Appeal to Truth*, insisted that a focus on grammar is a hindrance to anyone learning a language [i.e., Latin]:

... no man can run speedily to the mark of language that is shackled and ingiv'd with grammar precepts.... By exercise of reading, writing, and speaking after ancient Custom,... all things belonging to Grammar will, without labor, and whether we will or no, thrust themselves upon us (quoted in Howatt 1984: 34-5).

Webbe, in turn, was influenced by Georgius Haloinus Cominius, who one hundred years earlier

... argued that grammars were either long and tedious or short and confusing, and useless either way. In addition, they were by definition imperfect since language was in a state of constant flux and change, from one regional dialect to another, and from one year to another over the course of time (Howatt 1984: 35).

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Interestingly, though they share an aversion to form-focused instruction in the classroom, and are both regarded as "zero optionists," Prabhu admits he is not too keen on Krashenism: "The project group became aware with the publication of Krashen (1981), when the project had completed two years, of the striking similarity between these concepts and Krashen's concepts of 'acquisition' and 'comprehensive input.' There are, however, significant differences..." (Prabhu 1987: 6). For example, "'Comprehensive input' (Krashen 1981, 1982; Krashen and Terrell, 1983) is ... an inadequate concept for language pedagogy.... There is a similar difficulty with Krashen's concept of 'i+1'" (Prabhu 1987: 66).

S. Pit Corder is another scholar whose work could perhaps be classified under the "zero option" theoretical position (Ellis 1994: 652). Corder wrote pivotal articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s concerning "Idiosyncratic Dialects" (which commonly became known as the Interlanguage Hypothesis) and Error Analysis. He argued (1971, 1981) that the L2 learner has a "built-in syllabus." This means that the L2 learner's language is "unique to a particular individual, [and] that the rules of the learner's language are peculiar to the language of that individual alone" (Brown 1994: 204). Errors, then, must not be regarded as evidence of failure. Thus, classroom L2 learning is productive if L2 learners are permitted to progress along their unique interlanguage continuum "naturally." The concept has significant pedagogical ramifications, an important one of which is the following: once the L2 learner's interlanguage grammar has progressed enough for him or her to communicate sufficiently, the motivation to improve dissipates, the inevitable result being fossilization. And once this occurs all the form-focused instruction in the world won't do much good.

Technically Krashen is an advocate of a weak version of the "zero option,"<sup>21)</sup> that is, he argues that though grammar instruction should not necessarily be excluded from the classroom -- its primary goal being to provide learners with a Monitor<sup>22)</sup> -- it really is not all that essential:

"Grammar," a term I will use as a synonym for conscious learning, has two possible roles in the second language teaching program. First, it can be used with some profit as a Monitor.... A second use for grammar is as subject-matter, or for "language appreciation" (sometimes called "linguistics"),... Neither role is essential, neither is the central part of the pedagogical program, but both have their functions (Krashen 1982: 89).

However, though Krashen believes grammar, i.e., conscious rules, does have a place, albeit a minor one, in L2 classrooms, he is very emphatic in his opposition to having grammar taught sequentially (Krashen 1982: 128, 138). Krashen believes that there is sound empirical evidence that though grammar is **acquired** sequentially, it cannot be **taught** sequentially. This brings us to a key element in the Monitor Theory -- the controversial Natural Order Hypothesis.<sup>23)</sup>

### 2.3 The "Natural Order" Hypothesis <sup>24)</sup>

21) Also known as the "non-interface position" or the "anti-grammarians" proposal.

22) "The Monitor is quite limited, however" (Krashen 1985: 67). NB: from this point in the essay, all bold-face type in the quotations are mine.

23) It is more or less conventional wisdom among most Second Language Acquisitionists that first McLaughlin (1978), then Gregg (1984), and finally White (1987) made mince-meat out of the Monitor Theory and, to a lesser degree, the Natural Order Hypothesis. Space-limitations prevent me from presenting counter-arguments in favor of the Theory, though it wouldn't take up that much space because few scholars these days exert any effort to be sympathetic to Krashen -- Zobl (1995) being a notable exception, as mentioned above. To repeat what Gregg has written, above, "... it is a simple empirical fact that, as Eubank says, no one takes Krashen seriously" (1997/02/18).

24) Regarding how one should "arrive at hypotheses," Krashen once wrote: "I agree that subjective experience should not be *the* testing ground for a theory of language acquisition or processing. However, ... intuitions and feelings are very valuable in helping one arrive at hypotheses" (1979:160). Interestingly, Krashen, though he seems to have been keeping a relatively low profile in

...what a silly name.<sup>25)</sup>

Krashen's "Natural Order" Hypothesis -- wedged between the "Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis" and the "Monitor Hypothesis," that is, ranked second on the list of the five hypotheses that make up the Monitor Theory -- predicts that grammatical structures are acquired, not learned, in a predictable order; that is, they are independent of any order in which they may be learned, and independent of any order in which they may be taught. Furthermore, certain structures tend to be acquired early, while others tend to be acquired late, and again all this is independent of any attempts by textbook or teacher to alter that order (Krashen and Terrell 1995: 28). Hence, there is no pedagogical justification for teaching grammar sequentially, if for no other reason that the student will learn a particular grammatical structure when he or she is "ready" to learn it, and not before -- "which can be at different times for different people" (Dunlop 1994: 217). This would suggest that the rigid grammatical sequences illustrated on the "ESL Contents List" (Fig. 1, above) are pedagogically inefficacious.

Second language acquirers acquire (not learn) grammatical structures in a **predictable order** (Krashen 1980: 169).

We acquire the rules of language in a **predictable order**, some rules tending to come early and some 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 (Krashen 1985: 1).

... grammatical structures are acquired (not necessarily learned) in a **predictable order**. It states that we will see similarities across acquirers; certain structures will tend to be acquired early, while others will tend to be acquired late (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 28).

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SLA circles the past few years (when is the last time his articles have been published in *Applied Linguistics* or *Language Learning*?), he still manages to find himself in the vortex of intense controversy and criticism, this time for his role in helping to lead the fight against "Proposition 227," the so-called "1998 California 'English for the Children' Initiative."

25) Gregg's huffy dismissal of the Natural Order Hypothesis (1997/02/21; bit.listserv.slart-1).

Krashen and Terrell claim the Natural Order Hypothesis is "well supported by empirical data, and [is] thus far unblemished by damaging counter-examples" (1983: 25). First, it is a "well-established finding" (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 28) that there exists a natural order for the acquisition of English grammatical morphemes for children acquiring English as a first language. Thus, the Natural Order Hypothesis has been confirmed in first language acquisition among children. "An extremely important subsequent discovery was that children acquiring English as a second language also show a natural order for grammatical morphemes" (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 28-29). And "even more astounding, in our opinion, was the finding that adults also show a natural order of grammatical morphemes" (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 29).

"The discovery of common patterns in the way in which learner language changes over time is one of the most important findings of SLA. It provides further support for the conclusions reached from the study of learner errors, namely, that L2 acquisition is systematic and, to a large extent, universal, reflecting ways in which internal cognitive mechanisms control acquisition, irrespective of the personal background of learners or the setting in which they learn." (Ellis 1997: 24-25)

The primary empirical evidence for the Natural Order Hypothesis are the grammatical morpheme studies, which poured down like a Niagara in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And, as Gregg reminds us, "... the morpheme studies ... are the only evidential underpinning for the Natural Order Hypothesis" (1984: 85).

## 2.4 The English Morpheme Studies

There is something moving in the bushes.<sup>26)</sup>

According to Krashen, the grammatical morpheme studies illustrate the Natural

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26) Referring to the fact that the morpheme studies have uncovered some interesting linguistic phenomenon, the interpretation of which is still being debated (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 92).



Order Hypothesis concretely and persuasively:

When conditions for "Monitor-free" performance are met (little time, focus on communication rather than form), adult ESL performers show difficulty orders for certain grammatical morphemes that correlate highly with the difficulty orders for those morphemes in child L2 (Krashen 1977: 144).

Krashen calls this the "Natural Order," and he sees it to be the product of the "creative construction process" -- that is, language acquisition. In Monitor-free conditions, i.e., when the focus of attention is not on form but on meaning, adults and children show the same pattern of errors because they share the same "natural" system for acquiring the grammar rules. Gregg, even after arguing that Krashen's "Acquisition-Learning" Hypothesis and Monitor Hypothesis are castles built on shifting sand (Gregg 1984: 84), is willing to acknowledge that there is something to this Natural Order:

Here, as far as evidence goes, we are on **more solid ground**: there has been no end of morpheme studies, both in first and second language acquisition research, and **most** of the studies seem to **support this hypothesis**, at least as far as the morphemes studied are concerned (Gregg 1984: 84).

In the next section I will select from the veritable smorgasbord of grammatical morpheme studies and, due to space limitations, present a brief outline of several of major grammatical morpheme studies that are relevant to completing the assigned task:

#### A. ROGER BROWN -- 1973<sup>27)</sup>

- Research Question: do L1 learners acquire grammatical morphemes sequentially?

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27) The famous "Harvard Study" (Brown 1973) -- one of the most influential studies of first language acquisition -- found evidence for the fixed order of language acquisition of various English morphological features in three children: Adam, Eve, and Sarah. Brown found, among other things, that children tend to acquire certain grammatical morphemes relatively early (morphemes 1, 2, 3, etc.), and certain others relatively late (morphemes 12, 13, 14, etc.):

- Results: L1 children tend to acquire certain grammatical morphemes relatively early (e.g., the present progressive *-ing*) and certain others relatively late (e.g., the auxiliary *be*).

### B. DULAY AND BURT -- 1973

- Research Question: do L2 learners acquire grammatical morphemes sequentially?
- Results: a) L2 children appear to acquire certain morphemes in "a universal or natural order" (see Table 1, below), thus, b) exposing children to a natural communication situation is sufficient for L2 acquisition to take place (Ellis 1985: 57).

1 plural -s	2 <i>-ing</i>	3 cop. <i>be</i>	4 aux. <i>be</i>	5 <i>the / a</i>	6 irreg. past	7 3 <sup>rd</sup> -person -s	8 possessive -s
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*Table 1: Sequence of Grammatical Morphemes for Children Learning English* (adapted from a graph in Dulay and Burt [1973: 255], and in Cook [1993: 27])

Morpheme	Example
1 Present progressive <i>-ing</i>	He is sitting down.
2 Preposition "in"	The mouse is in the box.
3 Preposition "on"	The book is on the table.
4 Plural <i>-s</i>	The dogs ran away.
5 Past irregular	The boy went home.
6 Possessive <i>'s</i>	The girl's dog is big.
7 Uncontractible copula "be"	Are they boys or girls?
8 Articles "a" / "the"	He has a book.
9 Past regular <i>-ed</i>	He jumped the stream.
10 Third person regular <i>-s</i>	She nuns very fast.
11 Third person irregular e.g. has / does	Does the dog bark?
12 Uncontractible auxiliary "be"	Is the running?
13 Contractible copula "be"	That's a spaniel.
14 Contractible auxiliary "be"	They're running very slowly.

*Table: Order of L1 acquisition in English morphemes -- abridged from Clark and Clark 1977: 345 (Ellis 1994: 78)*

Thus, as in the case of L1 acquisition, "there does seem to be a common order of acquisition for certain structures in L2 acquisition" (Dulay and Burt 1973: 256). This finding was "surely one of the most exciting and significant outcomes of the last decade of second language research." Dulay and Burt's paper was "massively influential in content and methodology" (Cook 1993: 28).

### C. DULAY AND BURT -- 1974

- Research Question: granted, L2 learners acquire grammatical morphemes sequentially. But is this phenomenon due to the interference of their L1?
- Results: a) the learner's L1 does not affect the order of development in child L2 acquisition, and b) "universal cognitive mechanisms" are the basis for the child's organization of the target language (Ellis 1985: 57).

#### The L2 = L1 Acquisition Hypothesis <sup>28)</sup>

Do Dulay and Burt's research findings lend theoretical weight to the L2 = L1 Acquisition Hypothesis? Is L2 acquisition similar to L1 acquisition? Below is a table comparing their findings with Brown's research:

BROWN	1 -ing	2 plural -s	3 irreg. past	4 possessive	5 the / a	6 cop. be	7 3 <sup>rd</sup> -person -s
DULAY AND BURT	1 the / a	2 -ing	3 plural -s	4 reg. past	5 irreg. past	6 possessive -s	7 3 <sup>rd</sup> -person -s

*Table 2: Comparison of the Findings of Brown (1973) and Dulay and Burt (1974) regarding the Acquisition of Grammar Morphemes*

<sup>28)</sup> The L2 = L1 hypothesis, or the "identity hypothesis," raises a number of intriguing theoretical issues in SLA research. For example, is the LAD -- which is available for L1 learners -- also available for L2 learners (Clahsen 1990)?

This is important evidence for ... the natural order hypothesis.... The order of acquisition for second language is not exactly the same as the order of acquisition for first language, but there are some **clear similarities** (Krashen and Terrell 1983: 29).

There are noticeable similarities between the two sequences: all the morphemes occur within a range of two positions (i.e., apart from the articles -- 5 Brown versus 1 Dulay and Burt). Therefore,

The evidence that we have considered here suggests that the hypothesis is **partially supported**. Given the immense cognitive and affective differences between very young children and adults, the similarities in the language they produce is striking (Ellis 1994: 109).

#### D. HAKUTA -- 1974, 1976

- Research Question: yes, all this is very interesting, but can the studies be replicated?
- Results: the learner's<sup>29)</sup> grammatical acquisition sequence was "very distinctive." For example, the plural "-s" came **last** in the sequence -- rather than **3rd** (in Dulay and Burt 1973)! This study seemed to stifle somewhat the euphoria among advocates of the Natural Order Hypothesis.

#### E. BAILY, MADDEN, AND KRASHEN -- 1974

- Research Question: yes, this phenomenon among children is most intriguing, but is there a natural sequence in adult L2 learners?
- Results: a) adults use common strategies independent of L1 for L2 acquisition, b) adults process linguistic data in similar ways to children, and c) the most effective instruction is that which follows the observed order of difficulty (Ellis 1985: 57).

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29) Hakuta studied only one person, a Japanese 5-year-old called Uguisu.

**F. PERKINS AND LARSEN-FREEMAN -- 1975**

- Research Question: yes, adult L2 learners do indeed exhibit a sequential acquisition of morphemes, but what about the effects of classroom instruction? Does a teacher's teaching alter the order of acquisition?
- Results: a) the morpheme order in spontaneous data is the same as the natural order and did not change as a result of instruction (with the exception of an improvement in the possessive "-s."), and b) instruction does not radically alter the order of acquisition (Perkins and Larsen-Freeman 1975: 241; Ellis 1994: 628). Euphoria breaks out again among advocates of the Natural Order Hypothesis and the "zero option."

**G. MAKINO -- 1980**

- Research Question: maybe the grammatical morpheme sequence is peculiar to L2 learners where the L2 is actually spoken (ESL), that is, in the US, rather than in their native country (EFL), that is, in Japan, where that language is not spoken?
- Results: a) the grammatical morpheme sequence is true of L2 learners in classrooms in their native countries as well as those learners in a foreign country, and b) the order of morpheme acquisition is the same as the natural order and different from the order in the textbooks (Ellis 1994: 628).

MAKINO	1 -ing	2 the/a	3 plural -s	4 cop. be	5 possessive -s	6 aux. be	7 aux. be	8 3 <sup>rd</sup> -person -s	9 irreg. past
DULAY AND BURT	1 the/a	2 -ing	3 plural -s	4 reg. past	5 irreg. past	6 possessive -s	7 3 <sup>rd</sup> -person -s		

*Table 3: Comparison of the Findings of Makino (1980) and Dulay and Burt (1974) regarding the Acquisition of Grammar Morphemes in Japan and the US*

## H. PICA -- 1983

- Research Question: does formal instruction have any effect on interlanguage? If no differences are found in the order and sequence of L2 acquisition, then this would suggest that form-focused instruction has no effect.
- Results: this final study warrants going into a little more detail because it has pedagogical implications that bear directly on the assignment task I have chosen. I will quote from a convenient summary of her work as presented by Ellis (1997: 80):

... Pica compared three groups of L2 learners -- an untutored group, a tutored group, and a mixed group.... She found that the accuracy order of a number of grammatical features ... was broadly the same in the three groups, suggesting that **instruction had had little overall effect on acquisition**. However, when she looked closely at particular features she found some interesting differences in them. The tutored group was more accurate on plural *-s* than the untutored group, but less accurate on progressive verb *-ing*. The mixed group was intermediate in both cases. In contrast, there were no accuracy differences among the three groups on articles. These results led Pica to suggest that **the effects of instruction may depend on the target structure that is being taught**. If the structure is formally simple and manifests a straightforward form-function relationship (as in the case of plural *-s*), instruction may lead to improved accuracy. If the structure is formally simple and salient but is functionally fairly complex (as is the case with progressive *ing*), instruction may help learners to learn the form but its use so learners end up making a lot of errors. If a structure lacks saliency and is functionally very complex (as is the case with English articles) instruction has no effect at all (Ellis 1997: 80).

### 3. Conclusions Regarding the English Morpheme Studies

... theoretical claims should not go beyond the empirical evidence.<sup>30)</sup>

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30) Tarone (1988: 138).

There's no discounting the hypnotic effect of having to wade through a stream of grammatical morpheme studies.<sup>31)</sup> On the bright side one does not fear any future additions to the stream because they "have now been discontinued" (Ellis 1994: 95). Yet have these studies demonstrated the inviolability and invariability of the morpheme order? Have they provided a persuasive argument for the Natural Order Hypothesis?

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) conclude their own lengthy survey of the morpheme studies with the claim that

In sum, despite admitted **limitations** in some areas, the morpheme studies provide **strong evidence** that the interlanguages exhibit common accuracy / acquisition orders. Contrary to what some critics have alleged, there are in our view too many studies conducted with sufficient methodological rigor and showing sufficiently consistent general findings for the commonalities to be ignored (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 92).

But Ellis, Gregg, and McLaughlin feel Larsen-Freeman and Long have perhaps gone too far:<sup>32)</sup>

Such a conclusion, however, appears overly charitable, as it fails to recognize the **most serious limitation** in the morpheme studies -- the conceptualization of acquisition in terms of what Rutherford (1988) calls "accumulated entities," i.e., the mastery of grammatical items one at a time

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31) Those "pesky morpheme order studies that had everybody hypnotized for a few years and kept Krashen, Madden and Bailey busy, too..." Herbert Seliger (1997/05/22, Internet Newsgroup bit.listserv.slart-l).

32) There are numerous criticisms of the methodology employed in these studies, but for space limitations I will cite just one: because very few grammatical items are common to a majority of the studies, any insistence that there are common grammatical orders is based on a tiny portion of English grammar (just 9 items in Krashen's order, for instance). If the grammatical morpheme studies reveal anything significant, it is that the research findings applies to ESL, not SLA. (See an in-depth discussion of these methodological issues in McLaughlin 1987: 33-34.)

(Ellis 1994: 96).<sup>33)</sup>

Actually, if we are to extrapolate from grammatical morphemes to "structures" *lato sensu*, the Natural Order Hypothesis seems absurd. The strong form of the hypothesis would have the learner acquiring the, say, 3,217 structures of English by progressing from 1 to 3,217; or, for the unfortunate majority, stopping at 2,983 or 1,705 or wherever. (Alternatively, the learner progresses from one group of structures to the next group, with random order within the group.) On this view, the acquisition of a second language is rather like the acquisition of dinner: we start with the soup, proceed to the fish, then the meat, and so on. Of course, there is individual variation; some of us will eat all the asparagus before starting in on the mutton, while others will turn down the port and cigars. This is to me **an extraordinarily unlikely model of acquisition** (Gregg 1984: 85).

Krashen's theory fails at every juncture.... The case for the Natural Order Hypothesis is based largely on the morpheme studies, which are of **questionable methodological validity** and which, because they focus on final form, provide little information about acquisitional processes. If the Natural Order Hypothesis is to be accepted, it must be in a weak form, which postulates that some things are learned before others, but not always. Krashen has provided no theory as to why this is the case, so **this hypothesis does not tell us much**" (McLaughlin 1987: 56).

Nonetheless, the "picture that emerges from the grammatical morpheme studies" is this: there is indeed a standard "acquisition order," but it is not rigidly inviolable or invariant. However, the order is "remarkably similar, irrespective of the learners' language backgrounds, of their age, and of whether the medium is speech or writing" (Ellis 1994: 94). Thus, the studies have

... uncovered **something new and strange**: there are sequences for

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33) But later in his book he is even more uncharitable: "... the morpheme studies, on which great store was once set, are of **doubtful validity**, because their view of acquisition as one of 'accumulated entities' is seriously flawed" (Ellis 1994: 111).



grammatical morphemes common to virtually all second language learners that are not explicable solely in terms of their L1s or their learning situations (Cook 1993: 30).

#### 4. Can Formal Instruction "Subvert" the Natural Order?

Psycholinguistic research indicates that conscious attention interferes with linguistic processing.<sup>34)</sup>

If the Natural Order Hypothesis (albeit in a "weak form"), buttressed by the grammatical morpheme studies (while recognizing their methodological "limitations"),<sup>35)</sup> is accepted as an empirically valid theory, then this has important pedagogical implications and raises several interesting questions. Namely,

- Should ESL/EFL teachers teach grammar according to the natural order?<sup>36)</sup>
- Should grammar books (like the one my acquaintance is revising) be restructured so as to conform to the natural order (once scholars agree on what this "natural order" exactly is)?
- Can formal instruction subvert the natural order and help L2 learners acquire grammatical constructions faster?
- Do classroom L2 learners have a different accuracy / acquisition order from L2 learners who learn the language outside of the classroom?

Several of these questions were referred to during the brief survey of grammatical morpheme studies conducted above.<sup>37)</sup> What follows (after the table)

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34) See Van-Patten (1990) for relevant research (Zobl 1995: 39).

35) Ellis argues that "caution needs to be exercised" because the "notions of 'acquisition order' and 'sequence' remain controversial," and many of the conclusions of the morpheme studies "are based on very limited research" (Ellis 1994: 635).

36) Interestingly, Krashen does not advocate a syllabus based on the Natural Order Hypothesis!

37) See Table 4, above, for a summary of various studies that have investigated the effects of instruction on L2 acquisition.

is a brief sample of answers to some of the above questions:

Study	Type of classroom	Subjects	Proficiency	Data	Results
<b>Morpheme Order Studies:</b>					
Perkins and Larsen-Freeman 1975	ESL in the United States.	12 Venezuelan students just arrived in the United States.	Intermediate.	Translation test and spontaneous speech on a picture description task.	Morpheme order in spontaneous data same as natural order and did not change as a result of instruction. Order on translation task did change, however.
Fathman 1978	EFL in Germany vs. ESL in United States.	Adolescents in high school.	Mixed ability.	Oral production task.	Morpheme order for EFL and ESL learners were significantly correlated, but differences in types of errors found (e.g. EFL learners made more overgeneralization errors).
Tumer 1979	Intensive ESL in the United States.	Three 18-yr-olds.	Beginners.	Spontaneous speech and grammar task.	Order of morpheme acquisition same as natural order and different from order of instruction. Effect of instruction evident in grammar test.
Makino 1980	EFL in Japan.	Students in grades 9 and 10 of high school.	Lower-intermediate.	Written data based on picture stimuli.	Order of morpheme acquisition same as natural order and different from order in textbooks.

Sajavaara 1981b	EFL in Finland.	Adolescents in high school.		Elicited speech.	Morpheme order differed from natural order—articles ranked lower.
Pica 1983	EFL in Mexico/ESL in USA.	6 adult EFL learners/6 adult ESL learners and 6 natural learners.	Mixed ability levels.	Audio-taped conversations with the researcher.	Morpheme order the same as natural order.

*Table 4: Studies Investigating the Effects of Instruction on the Course of L2 Acquisition (Ellis 1985: 223)*

- Grammar instruction may prove powerless to alter the natural sequence of acquisition of developmental structures, as these are manifest in learner production (Ellis 1994: 635);
- Instruction does not appear to influence the order of development. No matter what order grammatical structures are presented and practiced in classroom, learners will follow their built-in syllabus (Ellis 1984: 150).
- ... instruction is powerless to alter the "natural" route of acquisition (Ellis 1994: 655).
- Premature instruction may cause learners to avoid using structures and so may inhibit acquisition (Ellis 1994: 635);
- There is **little, if any, support** for the claim that classroom learners must have formal instruction in order to learn the L2 (Ellis 1994: 657).
- In general, formal instruction does not appear to have any marked effect on the morpheme order reported for naturalistic or mixed SLA. (Ellis 1985: 220)
- ... formal SL instruction does not seem able to alter acquisition sequences, except temporarily and in trivial ways which may even hinder subsequent development (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 321).
- ... yet recent opinion (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991) concludes that there are enough studies carried out with sufficient methodological care which show sufficiently consistent findings. The theoretical rejection—not unjustified at the time—had largely to do with the absence of a theoretical motivation for the common orders. As mentioned earlier, recent developments in functional categories theory (e.g., Ouhalla 1991), L1 acquisition (e.g., Radford 1990), and L2 acquisition (e.g., Tsimpli and Roussou 1991; Eubank 1994) provide a solid theoretical framework within which to approach the morpheme orders (Zobl 1995: 40-41).

- Thus, it is now more difficult to discount the morpheme order as theoretically unrevealing and lacking in generalizability (Zobl 1995: 42).

What role, then, should "popular" grammar books, such as ones based on the "ESL Contents List" mentioned above, have in Korean classrooms? In answer to the question -- whether or not grammar can or should be taught sequentially (and most traditional grammar books are structured sequentially), based on the empirical evidence reviewed above (namely, the morpheme studies, which reveal that certain grammatical forms are acquired sequentially, irrespective of either the text or the teacher, but that grammatical forms cannot be taught sequentially), it can be argued that such grammar books are pedagogically unjustified, and as such, I believe, should have no role in Korean EFL classrooms.<sup>38)</sup> Does this mean there should be no place for grammar books *per se* and form-focused instruction of any sort in Korean classrooms? It is significant that both teachers and students in particular still expect this form of instruction to occupy a prominent place in the L2 classroom. In a particularly relevant study, R. Schulz (1996) interviewed 92 teachers and 824 students at the University of Arizona and recorded some startling opinions regarding the role of grammar instruction in the L2 classroom. With few exceptions, students harbor a "more favorable attitude toward formal grammar study than do teachers as a group" (80% vs. 64%; 1996: 345). Even more surprising, "46% of the student respondents claim to like grammar study, and 26% even want more of it" (1996: 345)! Thus, for whatever reason (perhaps "student opinions may be actually based on personal experiences that have convinced them their learning is enhanced by rule awareness..." 1996: 349), most EFL students expect grammar to be taught by the teacher in the classroom.

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38) This does not imply, of course, that I accept whole-hog the other hypotheses in Krashen's Monitor Theory, which, according to a consensus of second language acquisitionists, lack empirical veracity.

## 5. Form-Focused Instruction Based on Consciousness-raising (CR) and Data-Driven Learning (DDL) Techniques

Grammar ... does have a role, but it is no longer the lead actor in the play.<sup>39)</sup>

With the rise of the Communicative Language Teaching Movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, grammar-teaching and grammar books in particular took a pounding in the language-learning classroom (Tonkyn 1994: 4). Krashen's Monitor Theory, buttressed by the morpheme studies, played a significant role in this development, as was discussed briefly above. In the second half of the 1980s, however, "... there was a widespread reaction against the strong form of the ... approach espoused by Krashen and his colleagues" (Tonkyn 1994: 5). Many scholars expressed concern that a reckless abandonment of form-focused instruction would lead inevitably to fossilization (Hammerly 1985: 95; Higgs 1985: 201).<sup>40)</sup> This did not mean, of course, an advocacy of a hurried return to the lock-step methods of grammar instruction characteristic of grammar books "popular" in previous eras. Armed with new insights culled from research in second language acquisition, scholars began to introduce more subtle and indirect methods of

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39) Krashen 1982: 83.

40) A month or so ago, this writer exchanged e-mails with Ronald Sheen, a Second Language Acquisitionist teaching in Canada. He was asked why he was such an unrelenting anti-Krashenite, why when participating in the newsgroup "bit.listserv.start-l" he never had a kind word to say about Krashen. He e-mailed this response:

**Ronald Sheen**

**4/27/98**

My prime example is the method being used here in Quebec where the pedagogical guide reads like a primer in Krashen's hypotheses. There is no grammar syllabus of any sort. Teachers are supposed only to resort to punctual grammatical explanation when all else has changed. I say it's been a disaster because I have carried out hundreds of interviews with school leavers. **They can communicate reasonably well, but their language is error ridden at all levels and well on the way to fossilisation.**

explicit grammar instruction, in particular the techniques of CR and DDL, discussed below.

Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith have argued that form-focused instruction may "under certain conditions significantly increase the rate of acquisition over and above the rate expected from learners acquiring that language under natural circumstances where attention to form may be minimal and sporadic" (1985: 275). While both scholars have admitted their hypothesis, the Pedagogical Grammar Hypothesis (PGH), remains tentative and as yet empirically unverified, numerous other scholars have suggested that form-focused instruction may indeed accelerate learning.

There is now sufficient evidence from the research reviewed ... to show that form-focused instruction **can and does work**. It helps learners to perform grammatical features that are already part of their implicit knowledge with increased accuracy and it enables them to progress through developmental sequences more rapidly. In at least some cases, the effects of the instruction appear to be durable (Ellis 1997: 72).<sup>41)</sup>

Well, if form-focused instruction "can and does work," then the question that remains to be answered is what kind of form-focused instruction, what kind of grammar books and teaching materials, is the most efficacious, since the traditional grammar-translation methodologies (and, as I hope has been demonstrated above concerning grammar books based on rigid sequencing) have been largely abandoned?

Instead of having the teacher or the grammar book explain the L2

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41) Though in the next paragraph Ellis seems to argue just the opposite: "The problem is that these generalizations are not totally supported by the research; there are exceptions. Sometimes form-focused research works but only in the short term and sometimes it does not work at all. Teachers will want to know when form-focused instruction will work and when it will not. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to produce definite answers to this question" (Ellis 1997: 72). Inconsistency often seems to be the order of the day in the world of second language acquisition research. To quote Larsen-Freeman and Long, regarding SLA research, "... much work remains to be done" (1991: 333).

systematically and sequentially, a growing number of scholars advocate providing learners with authentic samples of the L2, and then letting them "draw their own conclusions about how the language works (Willis and Willis 1996: 63). The term for this kind of pedagogical activity is Consciousness-raising (CR), the "deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language" (Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith 1985: 274). Is there a rationale for CR? Rutherford asserts that grammatical CR "differs from conventional notions of 'grammar teaching' in fundamental ways,..." (1987: 24)

CR is a *means* to attainment of grammatical competence in another language ..., whereas "grammar teaching" typically represents an attempt to *instill* that competence directly.... (1987: 24) [CR is] ... a tool of language learning rather than the object of such learning. (1987: 30)

Traditional grammar practice as reflected in standard grammar books has been mainly behavioristic. This is definitely not the case with CR, which is characterized by "problem-solving and learning by discovery," and is "not an alternative to communication activities, but a supplement" (Willis 1997: 98).

CR is similar in many respects to Johns' Data-Driven Learning techniques, an "innovative and possibly revolutionary" (Johns 1991b: 27) approach to pedagogical grammar that relies on sophisticated CALL and various other computer software.

The DDL approach ... makes possible a new style of "grammatical consciousness-raising" ... by placing the learner's own discovery of grammar at the center of language-learning, and by making it possible for that discovery to be based on evidence from authentic language use (Johns 1991a: 3).

What distinguishes the DDL approach is the attempt to cut out the middleman as far as possible and to give direct access to the data so that the learner can take part in building up his or her own profiles of meaning and uses. The assumption that underlies this approach is that effective language learning is itself a form of linguistic research, and that the concordance printout offers a unique resource for the stimulation of inductive learning strategies -- in particular the strategies of perceiving similarities and differences and of hypothesis formation and testing (Johns 1991b: 297).

Johns' approach, though reportedly successful when tested on postgraduate students attending the University of Birmingham's English for International Students Unit (Willis et al. 1997a: 67), has not been tried on students possessing lower levels of English proficiency. However, Jones has argued that "if the requirement of authenticity of corpus is relaxed, all DDL methods can be applied from a very early stage (in Willis, et al., 1997a: 68).

## 6. Conclusions Regarding Form-Focused Texts, CR, and DDL

Grammar books that teach grammar sequentially and robotically, as exemplified by the English grammar books that my acquaintance is currently losing her hair over, are in my judgment, based on my current understanding of the research findings of second language acquisition relevant to this issue, pedagogically dubious, though it is admittedly difficult to substantiate this opinion without almost exclusive reliance on the Natural Order Hypothesis and the English Morpheme Studies, the interpretation of which is still a subject of much disagreement among second language acquisitionists. On the other hand, "grammar books" that employ more indirect methods of grammar instruction, books that are based on authentic materials and require self-discovery of grammatical patterns, seem to be worth serious consideration, especially the intriguing DDL method, if for no other reason than most students, especially Korean students, and, in this post-Krashen era, a growing number of ESL/EFL teachers as well, expect and, as mentioned above, actually demand explicit grammar instruction in the L2 classroom.



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## Abstract

### Form-Focused Instruction and the Natural Order Hypothesis

Tom Jernstad

The purpose of this paper is 1) to examine some of theories of second language acquisition that have cast doubt on the teachability of grammar, of form-focused instruction, and 2) to attempt to apply this information to a specific pedagogical issue concerning the Korean TEFL milieu. Specifically, this essay will attempt to address the question of whether or not the teaching of grammatical patterns sequentially, as epitomized by the "ESL Contents List," can be justified pedagogically. Finally, this essay will examine and evaluate briefly some alternative methods of form-focused instruction, specifically Consciousness-raising and Data-Driven Learning.

**Appendix A: "Excerpts from the "Dead Meat" Thread on the Newsgroup  
"bit.listserv.slart-l":**

**From: Lynn Alan Eubank**

**Date: 1997/02/16**

And in current research on SLA, I don't think Krashen plays any role at all. **Dead Meat**, so to speak. Back to work....

**From: Francisco Ramos**

**Date: 1997/02/17**

It's good to see how people base their opinions on solid research.

**From: Kevin Gregg**

**Date: 1997/02/18**

... Ramos ought to take a look at some SLA research; it is a simple empirical fact that, as Eubank says, no one takes Krashen seriously. Nor is that a particularly new situation; after all, the first detailed critique of Krashen's putative theory was published over a dozen years ago (Gregg 1984, and never rebutted, I might add). It is also an empirical fact that Krashen is still extremely popular among language teachers and in many schools of education; which speaks volumes about the state of teacher training in the United States.

**Green Matheson**

**Date: 1997/02/18**

Krashen may be "**Dead Meat**" but a lot of people doing things nowadays seem to be unable to stop beating the dead horse, so that his influence continues to hover over the field like a ghost....

**From: Timothy Mason**

**Date: 1997/02/18**

Ramos asked a simple, innocent question, and found himself being jumped upon from a great height. This said, if it is the case that Krashen is "**Dead Meat**" -- what a tasteful expression! -- one might ask why the basic text-books do give him something more than the time of day? I suspect that Greg Matheson is closer to the

truth on this, and that Mr. K is still setting the agenda even now.

Best wishes

**From: Herb Seliger<sup>42)</sup>**

**Date: 1997/02/18**

There we go again....

Referring to Krashen as "Dead Meat" was certainly an unfortunate choice of words, Lynn. I guess each generation is allowed its own portion of hubris, Krashen to his and we to ours. To slightly correct the record both Barry McLaughlin and I (1979) preceded Kevin Gregg in critiquing the monitor theory. With 20-20 hindsight, I guess we are all geniuses. While I am not a supporter of Krashen's theories, one must ask the question of why these theories are still so popular with language teachers.

I think that Krashen has tapped into a basic need that language teachers have --

1. his theories are accessible;
  2. his theories address common issues and problems in SLA that classroom teachers face.
- Current SLA literature is not accessible (maybe intentionally so?) and does not address classroom language acquisition. I think each area-the theoretical (as defined by Lynn and Kevin) and the practical (language teaching) -- has its own problems.... But let's try to keep the discourse civil.

**From: Lynn Alan Eubank**

**Date: 1997/02/18**

Before this gets completely out of hand, let me go ahead and add in a sentence or two that I probably should have added in my earlier quip. It is true that Krashen's views don't play in today's theorizing. It is, however, also true that Krashen was quite a hit in the SLA research community back in, oh, around 1978-1982 or so. Indeed, I remember being at TESOL in Mexico City 1978, back when SLA research was reported there. Krashen spoke, and the crowds went wild. It was very, very exciting. Heady times, as they say. So what happened? As Kevin points out, Krashen's work came under heavy fire in the 1980s -- not necessarily because he was wrong, e.g., about there being a distinction between his "acquisition" and "learning," but because his ideas were vague and untestable. (There are fancier words to use here; I won't bother.) So Krashen is not "Dead Meat" in the sense that he was dead wrong in his ideas; rather, it's just that his vague ideas so paled

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42) Selinger, incidentally, co-authored several articles with Krashen back in the 1970s.

in comparison to those of, e.g., Noam Chomsky, that Krashen got left in the dust (hence "Dead Meat"). In hindsight, it's just a shame that Krashen didn't continue in SLA research. He's obviously a bright guy who had some interesting ideas -- for their time.

**From: Kevin Gregg**

**Date: 1997/02/19**

Now what I said that seemed to cause all this brouhaha was simply that Krashen is not taken seriously -- and for eminently compelling reasons -- by the SLA research community. (I should qualify that, of course. There are serious and important SLA researchers -- Bonnie Schwartz being foremost among them -- who are doing interesting, theoretically-based work in an effort to give empirical content to Krashen's learning / acquisition distinction, something Krashen himself has never bothered to do.) (And I must apologize to Herb; I certainly didn't intend to claim to be the first to have criticized Krashen in print, although I still do think *Moi* 1984 is the most detailed critique.)

... Herb Seliger, and others, refer to Krashen's theory or theories in their postings; I think this is a mistake, or at least a misleading use of the term "theory." Krashen had one interesting and provocative idea -- that conscious learning is of no avail in 2nd language acquisition. And this idea is clearly and uncontroversially wrong... The other ideas, or "hypotheses" of his "theory," are either truisms -- you need comprehensible input to acquire a language -- or vague or incoherent claims, like his i+1 nonsense.

...Given that Krashen's "theory" is, in Lynn's perhaps infelicitous phrase, "Dead Meat" among the people whose job it is to try to put together a theory of SLA, we need to account for the other fact, on which Francisco Ramos and I are agreed, that it is anything but **Dead Meat** among language teachers. Now if I really mocked teachers and looked down on them, I might say that they just don't recognize crap when they see it. But I in fact respect teachers enough to persist in believing that they can't be so benighted as to think that claiming that comprehensible input is essential is a revolutionary insight, rather than common sense.

So why the popularity? A couple of reasons come to mind: a) as I said, teachers are far too busy to have the time to sift through the SLA literature; b) Krashen himself, unlike SLA researchers, has had no compunction about touting his stuff on the lecture circuit; and c) MA courses aren't doing their job. I admit I have no evidence as to (c), and I'd be curious to know just what is taught in the scores of MA/TEFL and Applied Linguistic courses in the U.S. regarding SLA

**From: Mike Sharwood-Smith**

**Date: 1997/04/25**

The real issue is not, say, the appropriateness or netiquette of colorful expressions like "Dead Meat." This has to be irrelevant. Nor is it -- and this is much more important -- whether some of all of Krashen's views may gain new empirical support in the future. I could make a pronouncement about acquisition that was 100% true and extremely interesting, but no one would or should take much notice until I had produced some robust arguments PLUS robust evidence in favor. Krashen didn't, although he made some very strong claims and was good at putting them forward. In addition, his theoretical model was in need of some real tightening up, in linguistic terms and in strictly psychological terms (especially with respect to the role of consciousness). He might even agree himself but, again, that is not relevant!. His historical importance is also not at issue. To sum up in simplistic terms

- 1) Krashen may still be "right."
- 2) He turned out not to be convincing (within SLA).
- 3) He is to be commended for stimulating theory and experimentation in SLA.
- 4) And he may still be "wrong."