Against Comprehensible Input: 
the Input Hypothesis and the Development 
of Second-language Competence

LYDIA WHITE
McGill University

S. D. Krashen argues that language acquisition is caused by learners understanding input which is slightly beyond their current stage of knowledge, by means of context and other extra-linguistic cues, and that, while we should not try to provide input which specifically aims at the next stage, 'comprehensible' input is particularly beneficial. In this article I will suggest that there are a number of problems with Krashen's input hypothesis, as currently formulated. Firstly, by concentrating on meaning and context, he misses the fact that certain aspects of grammar development in the learner are largely internally driven, and independent of context or meaning. Secondly, he overestimates the role and benefits of simplified input. Thirdly, Krashen feels that we can never really be sure what input is relevant to what stage, but this is due to the imprecision of his formulation: once one incorporates a detailed theory of language, it is possible to come up with a theory to identify precisely what aspects of input trigger development. Finally, there are circumstances where the second-language (L2) input will not be able to show the learner how to retreat from certain non-target forms: the input hypothesis is geared to handling additions to intermediate grammars, rather than losses. I will argue that second-language acquisition theory should indeed include an input hypothesis, and, consequently, that we should try and tighten up Krashen's formulation to deal with these objections, rather than abandoning it.

1. INTRODUCTION
Krashen (1980a, 1981, 1982, 1985) addresses the important issue of how it is that learners proceed from one stage to another in the course of acquiring a second language. His proposal, formulated as the Input Hypothesis, is that:

a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage \( i \) to stage \( i + 1 \) is that the acquirer understand input that contains \( i + 1 \), where 'understand' means that the acquirer is focussed on the meaning and not the form of the message (Krashen 1982: 21).

As noted by Gregg (1984), Krashen's use of the expression \( i + 1 \) wavers between meaning the learner's competence at the stage after stage \( i \) and meaning the next structure to be acquired. Both uses can be seen in the above quotation. For consistency, I shall reserve the term \( i + 1 \) for the learner's next level of competence; in other words, I shall assume that \( i + 1 \) cannot itself be in the input, although input can be relevant to \( i + 1 \).

Krashen also says that input that has been understood is not merely a necessary condition for acquisition but actually causes acquisition, a much stronger claim, although Krashen sees the two as equivalent (1982: 33). In addition, he argues that if communication is successful, input relevant for \( i + 1 \)
is automatically provided, and hence that the best input should not deliberately aim at $i + 1$, and, indeed, that it may be harmful to do so. By this he means that one should not attempt to provide a sequentially ordered syntactic or morphological syllabus in the input. Along with this is the claim that simple codes, such as caretaker speech in L1 acquisition, or foreigner-talk and teacher-talk in L2 acquisition, provide ideal input for $i + 1$, because they are easily comprehensible and not finely-tuned to the learner's needs. Fine-tuning is assumed to be problematic because it may be fine-tuned in a way that is in fact irrelevant.

In this article, I shall propose that while there is something essentially correct about the input hypothesis, in its present form it suffers from a number of defects. Firstly, by emphasizing the role of context and meaning, Krashen does not address the question of the extent to which change in the learner's grammar can emerge as a result of the learner's current lexical and syntactic knowledge alone. In addition, in the absence of any explicit theory as to what the prior knowledge of the learner consists of, we lack any indication of precisely how the input hypothesis works, i.e. we do not know how the new input interacts with the existing grammar to bring about change.

Secondly, his linking of the input hypothesis to the desirability of comprehensible input, as provided by teacher-talk, etc., is problematic, and is surely not necessary. An important aspect of the input hypothesis is that it highlights the fact that acquisition must be learner-defined: how the learner proceeds depends on his or her current state (or $i$). Hence, according to Krashen, it is pointless for outsiders (such as teachers) to manipulate the input, since they cannot know precisely what the learner's current state is, nor what the relevant input is. However, simplified input is also a form of manipulation of the input by outsiders, a form of manipulation which can have particularly unsatisfactory consequences for acquisition, since it often deprives the learner of essential information about language. Indeed, one might argue that many forms of simplified input would result in $i - 1$, rather than $i + 1$! If learners are able unconsciously to focus on input relevant to $i + 1$, it is not clear why it should be so important that teachers should provide them with comprehensible input. Only the learner 'knows' his or her current state of linguistic competence, so for an outsider to try to provide comprehensible input can be just as misleading as for an outsider to provide input in the form of a specific syntactic syllabus.

Finally, I will suggest that as far as the second-language learning situation is concerned, there are a number of situations where comprehensible input, as defined by Krashen, necessarily cannot lead to change in a learner's grammar. This arises when the learner has made certain kinds of incorrect generalizations about the L2, or has wrongly assumed that L2 is like L1 in certain respects. In these circumstances, fine-tuning may, in fact, be beneficial. Krashen treats acquisition as if it were essentially a matter of rule-addition. Once one admits other kinds of grammar change as taking place in an L2 learner's interlanguage, Krashen's version of the input hypothesis becomes inadequate. However, the input hypothesis is sufficiently important in what it attempts to express for it to be useful to try and tighten it up, rather than rejecting it out of hand.

2. INTERNALLY DRIVEN CHANGES
Krashen suggests that the driving force for change in the current grammar, or $i$, is the learner's understanding of structures that are 'a little beyond' where he or
she is now, and that this raises a paradox: how can one understand language that contains structures not yet acquired? The paradox is resolved by the fact that people use extra-linguistic information to establish the meaning of utterances. I do not wish to quarrel with this claim; it is surely partly true, though imprecise in its formulation, and I will illustrate in a moment how it might work, specific syntactic illustrations being sadly lacking in Krashen’s writing. What I question is Krashen’s emphasis on this as the main way we can make use of input which is beyond the current grammar. I will show that input can also initiate change regardless of context or meaning, depending on system-internal factors, suggesting that comprehensible input cannot be the only impetus to development in a learner’s grammar. Krashen (1983, 1985) hints at a similar possibility: ‘the creative construction process . . . produces new forms without the benefit of input by reorganizing the rules that have already been acquired’ (1983: 138). Unfortunately, he does not pursue this interesting suggestion anywhere, nor state precisely what he means by it.

I assume that the learner’s current grammar (or i) acts as a filter on the input (Gleitman et al. 1984; Newport et al. 1977; Shipley et al. 1969; Roeper 1982; White 1982). That is, the learner rejects input which cannot be interpreted in terms of his or her current knowledge, or modifies it so that it can be dealt with. This kind of filtering is quite different from Krashen’s proposal for affective filters, in that it depends on the learner’s linguistic state, rather than on psychological factors. What we are interested in is what causes the learner to stop the filtering effect, what properties of the input will stimulate grammar change and allow new input to be dealt with.

First, let us consider a hypothetical case where contextual factors might force change. Suppose we have a learner who has not yet acquired the passive; passive is the rule to be acquired; i represents the learner’s system without passive, and i + 1 represents the next grammar, the stage at which the learner will have internalized a passive rule. Our putative learner already knows (as part of the current i), that English word order is SVO and that subjects commonly have the thematic role of agent. If the learner hears a passive sentence like John was kissed by Mary, he or she may filter out the was and the by, and interpret this as an active sentence: John kissed Mary, with John the agent of the action. In many cases, the context will be consistent with such an interpretation. Now suppose, in contrast, that the learner hears a sentence such as The book was read by John. Here, the learner’s knowledge of the real world (books do not read) or the context in which the sentence is uttered (John is reading a book) could indeed force the learner to initiate grammar change. If this sentence is interpreted as an active sentence, with the book as agent, in accordance with the current grammar i, it will result in something that is meaningless or contrary to fact. The context and meaning suggest that John is still the agent, so this could force the realization that there must be another way, syntactically, of analysing the sentence.

However, a non-linguistic context is often compatible with many syntactic structures, so that while such a context may be sufficient to rule out a particular syntactic analysis, it will not necessarily indicate what it must be replaced by. For example, the above context is also compatible with an active clefted construction like It was a book that John read. An input hypothesis alone cannot explain how a particular rule, in this case passive, is acquired, as opposed
to some other rule, such as clefting, which also fits the context. Because Krashen talks of structures as being present in the input, he makes it seem automatic that a particular structure will be acquired at stage $i + 1$. In fact, this is begging the question; input does not arrive in the form of structures, but in the form of data which require a structural analysis. Structure is imposed on the input by the learner; this is what a grammar does. In the absence of a precise characterization of the content of the learner's grammar and the kinds of principles it is constrained by, it is not clear how the learner could proceed to the next stage, as opposed to merely recognizing that the current stage is insufficient. If we add a theory as to the content of the kinds of options available to the learner, we may be able to remedy this particular shortcoming, a point I shall return to. Notice here that, strictly speaking, the driving factor for grammar change is that the input is incomprehensible, rather than comprehensible. That is, interpreted in terms of a grammar $i$ without a passive rule, a sentence like The book (was) read (by) John is garbage. If we assume that learners are driven by some general desire to make sense of as much of what they hear as possible, then, on being confronted with this kind of nonsense, a re-analysis of the grammar will be forced, in order to make sense of the input.

Still using our hypothetical acquisition of the passive as an example, let us now turn to a case where context and extra-linguistic information do not play a role at all. Berwick and Weinberg (1984) propose a model for the L1 acquisition of the passive and show how the child might be forced to adopt a passive rule on the basis of prior syntactic or lexical knowledge. Furthermore, given that their analysis is based on the assumption that language acquisition is constrained by specific principles of universal grammar (UG), they are able to suggest not only how an active interpretation must be dropped (at stage $i$) but also that it must be replaced by a rule of passive (at stage $i + 1$). Suppose that our passiveless learner hears a sentence like John was hit, without a clear context (perhaps it is part of a story without any pictures, for example). In the real world, people hit, so there would be nothing semantically implausible in assuming that John is the agent here, i.e. in filtering out the was and interpreting the sentence as the active John hit. However, in acquiring the verb hit, the learner will have acquired the information that it obligatorily subcategorizes for the thematic role of theme; we can say John hit the ball but not John hit. In addition, the learner will 'know' that this theme normally occurs to the right of the verb, as the direct object. When a sentence like John was hit is heard, something must be interpreted as the obligatory theme of the verb. Since John is the only NP available in the sentence, John must be the theme and not the agent, and since the theme is normally to the right of the verb, it must have 'moved'. Here, the passive analysis of the sentence is forced on the learner, by purely formal means. In the case of the full passive John was hit by Fred, Fred is available to be interpreted as the theme, in the usual position for themes, provided that the preposition is ignored, so that short passives may provide more suitable input for grammar change here than long passives. In other words, to acquire passive in this way, it is necessary that the input contain a sentence like John was hit, but it is not necessary that the learner be able to interpret it by means of contextual or extra-linguistic cues. Thus, for this case at least, there may be more than one potential route for grammar change. Berwick and Weinberg's proposal was made for L1 acquisition only; however, if, as Krashen suggests, L1 and L2 acquisition have a great deal in
common in terms of the mechanisms underlying them, it is worth considering whether such system-internal changes might not also be available in L2 acquisition. The route to $i + 1$ via system-internal changes is not incompatible with the input hypothesis, provided that the hypothesis does not focus exclusively on comprehensible input.

Many of Krashen's arguments for another aspect of his theory, the Natural Order Hypothesis, stem from work done on the acquisition of certain English morphemes. If one considers how these morphemes might be acquired, it is not clear that contextual and non-linguistic factors can be the means for acquiring them either. For example, suppose one has a learner who has yet to mark third-person singular in English and is producing forms like Mary eat an apple. The input to this learner will contain sentences like Mary eats an apple, and it seems clear that these have been understood. There is nothing about the meaning or context of this message that can contribute to the learner's realization that English happens to mark third-person singular present tense with a particular morpheme. It may indeed be the case that such learners filter out the input that contains the relevant morpheme, that they are somehow not ready for this input, as Krashen (1985) proposes, but this constitutes a restatement of the problem rather than an explanation in terms of the input hypothesis.

A definition of what constitutes relevant input for acquisition and an explanation of how this leads to development in the learner's grammar depend crucially on a theory of language. Krashen clearly accepts some version of Chomsky's innateness hypothesis, and something similar to Universal Grammar (UG) is implied in his use of terms like language acquisition device (1982), creative construction process (1983), or organizer (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982), but he nowhere specifies any content for these. Krashen suggests that an advantage of the input hypothesis, as he formulates it, is that we do not need to focus on structures not yet acquired but ready to be learned, (a) because they will be in the input anyway, and (b) because we do not know in most cases what the learner is ready for or what the relevant input is. I will return to (a) in Section 4. In practice, (b) is probably true. However, as soon as one imputes some real content to the notion of UG, it is possible to come up with quite specific theories as to what aspects of the input might motivate grammar change in the learner, and to tighten up the input hypothesis so that we can have at least some idea of what might be going on. Indeed, the input hypothesis only becomes interesting and testable if we do have some specific ideas as to how the input data interact with the learner's existing knowledge, both given (= UG) and acquired (= $i$).

A number of recent L1 acquisition theories see certain aspects of the input acting as 'triggers' for grammar change (e.g. Hyams 1983; Roeper 1981; White 1982) and, as discussed by Roeper (1981), these triggers can be of various types, some cognitive, some maturational, some semantic, some purely linguistic. Krashen's input hypothesis tacitly assumes some such concept, although only one class out of many potential types of triggers is recognized, namely semantic/non-linguistic triggers. The idea is that something in the acquisition situation forces change in an existing $i$ because it is insufficient to handle certain aspects of the input data and that the triggers interact with something, either UG or the previous grammar or both. For example, in the hypothetical passive cases discussed above, either the extra-linguistic context (books do not read) or the linguistic form (the short passive form of an
A trigger (obligatorily transitive verb) could act as the trigger for change, but only in the latter case do we have a theory which suggests precisely what kind of change this trigger brings about (transitive verbs require themes, so a passive analysis is forced). To have any real content, an input hypothesis needs both these aspects, i.e. a theory of what precise aspect of the input interacts with what aspect(s) of the learner’s existing system.

Triggers do not necessarily involve semantic or extra-linguistic cues at all, as is the case if passive can be acquired through knowledge of the argument structure of active verbs, as discussed above. To take another example, Hyams (1983) proposes that children learning English as their mother tongue start out by assuming that it is a pro-drop language like Italian or Spanish, and hence that subject pronouns are not obligatory. This explains why young children commonly omit pronouns when learning English as their L1. There is nothing in the meaning or context of a sentence like *It is raining* which would indicate to the L1 (or L2) learner that *it* is required in English. Hyams suggests that the realization that pronouns are obligatory in English is eventually triggered by the expletive pronouns *it* and *there*, which, precisely because they cannot be there for any semantic or pragmatic reasons (they are devoid of semantic content and cannot be used for emphasis) indicate that pronouns in English are required for structural reasons. She assumes that pro-drop is connected to a number of other structures through the pro-drop parameter (Chomsky 1981) and that the realization that pronouns are obligatory in turn triggers the emergence of another aspect of English inconsistent with the pro-drop parameter, namely modal auxiliaries, which until this point are ignored, or filtered out. That is, the need to accommodate lexical pronouns in the child’s grammar causes internal changes, which in turn mean that modals are no longer filtered out of the data. In other words, we see the input playing different, and fairly intricate, roles in the course of grammar development. Expletives in the input trigger the first change; this change leads to reorganization of the grammar which then allows the child to view the input in a different way and accommodate more of it. The effects of the original input are not necessarily direct. Of course, Hyams’ hypothesis may turn out to be incorrect, but the fact remains that she makes a specific proposal as to what kinds of change are possible in acquisition, what aspects of the grammar will change, and what kind of input is required to bring this change about. Krashen’s assumption that we cannot know what input is relevant to *i* + 1 is due to the fact that he never has any specific proposal as to what *i* and *i* + 1 consist of. As soon as one takes some kind of theoretical stance on the nature and form of learners’ grammars, one can make quite specific and testable proposals as to what aspects of the input motivate change, and what kind of change to expect. Krashen is right that we do not know what input is relevant for *i* + 1, but his implication that we cannot know is too strong.

3. THE QUESTION OF SIMPLIFIED INPUT
We have seen so far that whilst Krashen’s input hypothesis is rather vague, it can in fact be made quite explicit—but that doing so requires one to recognize that contextual and extra-linguistic cues are by no means the only route to grammar development. A consequence of trying to make the input proposals explicit is that we gain some idea of what is required in the input to stimulate change, and how this interacts with the learner’s existing knowledge.
I will suggest in this section that Krashen is misguided in claiming that the input hypothesis is dependent on comprehensible input, as provided by caretaker speech, foreigner talk, teacher talk, and other forms of simplified input. The more we specify the content of the learner grammar and the properties of the input that are required to stimulate development, the more we see that simplified input is deficient in many respects. Krashen seems to feel that this emphasis on simplified input is a necessary part of his input hypothesis, but this is not at all the case. I should like to suggest that we need a detailed and explicit input hypothesis, in fact a theory of triggers of L2 development, but that this should be dissociated from claims that language addressed to learners has particularly beneficial properties; there is no logical connection between the two.

Krashen (1982) claims that evidence from first-language acquisition suggests that ‘caretaker speech’ is beneficial for language acquisition, particularly the following aspects of such speech: it is syntactically simpler than adult-to-adult speech, it is roughly-tuned to the child’s linguistic level, it concerns the ‘here and now’. The last of these is simply irrelevant in the L2 context; the preponderance of ‘here and now’ topics in conversations to young L1 learners is most likely to reflect the adult’s perception of the child’s cognitive maturity, rather than having anything specifically to do with language. Gleitman, Newport, and Gleitman (1984: 55), henceforth GNG, note that ‘no finding from ... any study ... suggests either THAT such a property [i.e. here and nowness, L.W.] of the maternal speech aids the learning, or HOW it would do so’. Krashen also claims that input relevant to i + 1 must contain many examples of the structure to be learned and that caretaker speech provides this. As noted by GNG, it is not clear to what extent frequency of occurrence of a form contributes to its ease of acquisition. There seem to be some things which are acquired on the basis of very few exemplars.

As far as rough-tuning is concerned, Krashen sees this as an advantage, but it could just as well be a disadvantage; that is, there is no guarantee that it will contain input beyond the current grammar. Indeed, Newport, Gleitman, and Gleitman (1977), henceforth NGG, suggest that mothers often underestimate their child’s level of syntactic development, indicating that they might sometimes fail to provide input containing structures just beyond the current grammar. (Luckily for such children, mothers are not the only source of language input to children.)

This leads us to the biggest problem with the proposals that this kind of special input is beneficial. If, indeed, input to learners is simpler than input to adults, then it may in fact be detrimental. This is most obvious in the case of one kind of input which Krashen (1980b) and Krashen and Terrell (1983) consider advantageous, namely the interlanguage output of other language learners, serving as input to fellow students. Imagine a number of native speakers of Spanish learning English. Such native speakers are known to omit subject pronouns (Cancino et al. 1975; Butterworth and Hatch 1978; White 1985a). Given such input, how on earth is someone learning English with them going to establish that pronouns are obligatory in English? Such input would lack precisely that aspect of language which is supposed to trigger loss of pro-drop, if Hyams' analysis is correct. Similarly, consider the morpheme studies, which show that native speakers of various different backgrounds start out by omitting...
a number of English morphemes. How could a language learner learn the correct use of the morphemes from such input? Input of this kind lacks exemplars of what is correct in English (in other words, it does not contain forms relevant to \( i + 1 \)) and constitutes a form of deprivation.\(^6\)

Simplified input from native speakers may cause similar sorts of deprivation. There are many complex properties of language that do not show up in simple sentences. By talking to learners only in simple sentences, one is depriving them of input which is crucial. Most writers who have seriously considered the learnability problem deny that simplified input can have the kind of causal role that Krashen imputes to it, and point out that such input would lead to severe learnability problems (e.g. GNG 1984; Hornstein and Lightfoot 1981; Lightfoot 1982; NGG 1977; Pinker 1984; Wexler and Culicover 1980). Furthermore, GNG, in a reanalysis of the NGG data, show a significant positive correlation between complex maternal speech and language growth in the children.

I do not wish to deny that there may be benefits from talking to L2 learners in certain special ways. For example, it is common for language learners to complain that the language they are learning is spoken too fast, and they find it easier to handle if spoken slowly. This is not surprising; L2 learners have to parse the input, to break it up into its constituent parts, and it is no doubt easier to identify units, such as words, when the stream of speech is slow. This does not, however, mean that speaking slowly will automatically lead to progress to the next stage.

Krashen uses the terms input and intake indiscriminately. Indeed, he claims that comprehensible input is intake:

‘Intake’ is, simply, where language acquisition comes from, that subset of linguistic input that helps the acquirer acquire language. It appears to be the case to me now that the major function of the second language classroom is to provide intake for acquisition... ‘Caretaker’ speech, language addressed to young children acquiring their first language, contains a high proportion of intake. (1981: 101-2; italics in original)

Quite apart from the fact that language acquisition does not ‘come from’ intake alone, but is due to a complex interaction of input and the internal system, together with many other factors not relevant to the issues discussed in this paper, this is not the usual definition of intake, nor the one intended by Corder (1967) when he introduced the term. The distinction between input and intake was originally made in order to distinguish between language that is produced in the presence of learners (input) and language that is actually absorbed by learners (intake). This means that intake is defined by the learner, and it is not possible for the language classroom deliberately to provide intake, nor for caretaker speech to contain intake. Both contain input, part of which may or may not be taken in. Krashen’s use of the term ‘intake’ suggests that it is, in some way, within the teacher’s control, but if it is the learner’s existing system that defines what input becomes intake, then any outside manipulation of input is likely to be haphazard, because it might not hit the relevant input for some \( i + 1 \). (Of course, Krashen holds this view too, but only as regards specific grammar teaching.) As far as L1 acquisition is concerned, GNG observe that ‘it is most importantly the CHILD who changes (in the material he attends to and exploits), rather than the MOTHER (in how she speaks). As usual, we must look to properties of the child learner, more than to specific properties of his environment, to explain the
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learning.' Since Krashen takes much of his justification for comprehensible
input from the L1 acquisition literature, he should be aware that a number of
researchers emphasize the role of the learner and feel that it is not possible to
manipulate the input in any useful way. If Krashen would dissociate the
comprehensible input claims from the input hypothesis, he would have a
position which is consistent with this emphasis on the learner, an emphasis that
the input hypothesis otherwise highlights.

4. WHERE COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT FAILS

So far, I may have given the impression that I agree with Krashen that manipula-
tion of the input is a waste of time, only I have extended this beyond the question
of structural grammar teaching to suggest that deliberately providing
comprehensible input may, at worst, deprive learners of necessary input. In fact,
I believe that there will be occasions when structural language teaching can be
useful for acquisition and when negative data or correction might help. Krashen
(1981, 1982) also accepts a role for structural teaching and for correction, but
only within the context of conscious learning and monitoring, as he defines
them. He specifically excludes them as factors in acquisition. I would like to
propose that specific grammar teaching and correction can in fact sometimes be
beneficial for acquisition, in Krashen's sense.

Krashen's input hypothesis rests implicitly on the assumption that language
acquisition consists mainly of adding rules to a grammar, and it can be made
workable in many cases where rule addition is involved. Positive evidence in the
input motivating a particular structure which is not yet present in the learner's
grammar could stimulate the acquisition of that structure, and we have seen in
Section 2 that there are various potential triggers to force such structures into i
+ 1, not all involving the need for contextual and situational cues. However,
there are many cases in L2 acquisition where the learner may have to do some-
thing other than add rules to his or her current grammar, and here the input
hypothesis runs into difficulties, unless we allow negative data or specific
structural teaching, neither of which is included in Krashen's concept of
comprehensible input. Specifically, we must consider the question of how the
learner loses non-target intermediate forms.

According to Krashen (1983), to initiate change the learner must compare i
with any data suggesting that a new rule is required and, if a mismatch is
revealed, the new rule becomes a candidate for acquisition. Whether the new
form is actually adopted depends on whether it turns up in the input again; in
other words, a new hypothesis must be confirmed by further input before it is
finally adopted. If it is not confirmed, it is discarded. This idea depends crucially
on the learner being able to detect gaps between the current grammar and the
input. Unfortunately, there are a number of situations where there will be no
obvious gap, where inconsistencies will not be apparent from examination of the
input. Such situations are particularly likely to arise where the learner has to lose
some rule or form, as opposed to adding one.

Baker (1979) discusses some such cases when he raises the problem of how to
deal with the question of overgeneralizations by language learners (and by
linguistic theories). He discusses two classes of exception to linguistic rules,
some 'benign' and some problematic. Krashen's input hypothesis can handle
benign exceptions, but the other kind of exception, if found in L2 acquisition,
will lead him into considerable difficulty. A benign exception is involved when a learner has made some generalization and then has to learn an exception to it, but that exception is itself clearly present in the input data. For example, the regular past tense formation rule in English is 'add -ed to the stem' (phonological details omitted), as in danced, helped, shouted, etc. A form like went is an exception to this rule. The language learner who has acquired this rule and extended it to the verb go, to produce goed, can learn that goed must be dropped and replaced by went simply by noticing went in the input. In other words, the learner hears a new form, went, 'compares' this to his or her current i, finds that i does not include went, and adds it to the lexicon as an exceptional form. If we make an additional assumption that concepts like past tense only have one morphological realization, then goed will drop. Here Krashen's hypothesis would not run into any particular difficulty; there is a contrast between the input and the current grammar, although meaning or extra-linguistic factors are not involved in noticing this contrast. Any learner who says things like John goed to the store has clearly understood both that past time is marked in English and that it is marked in a particular way. There is no additional aspect of meaning or context that can indicate that went is in fact the correct past tense form for go. While it is the case that positive evidence from English will reveal a contrast to the learner, it might also be the case that the language teacher can provide a short cut, either by means of correction, or by the teaching of exceptional forms. L1 learners appear to pay little attention to such correction, but L2 learners might. The point is that it is not crucial if they do not, given that the necessary evidence for i + 1 is explicitly present in the input.

This is in complete contrast to the other kind of exception discussed by Baker. For example, the English dative alternation involves many verbs which have two possible complements, such as give:

1a. John gave some money to the hospital.
1b. John gave the hospital some money.

There are also many other words, of similar meaning, which allow only one of the two complements:

2a. John donated some money to the hospital.
2b. *John donated the hospital some money.

Baker's point is that if learners made the assumption that forms like (2b) are possible, there would be nothing in the input to show them that they are mistaken. Unlike the case of the irregular past tense, there is no contrasting form; in the case of (1a) and (1b) both forms are possible, they are not in contrast. In the case of (2), however, only (2a) occurs. The question is, how could learners learn the non-occurrence of (2b)? Baker argues that L1 learners do not, in fact, make such overgeneralizations at all, and hence that one does not have to explain how they learn the non-occurrence of such forms. He does suggest, however, that we have to assume certain constraints both on the theory of UG and on the acquisition process to explain why such overgeneralizations do not occur. In second-language acquisition, however, there are a number of situations where L2 learners make errors of precisely this nature. That is, they assume that something is possible in L2 which is not in fact possible, and there is
no L2 input which will reveal that this is what they have done. In other words, their grammars must undergo rule loss, or loss of certain forms, without these being replaced by something else. This is a case where Krashen’s proposals can do nothing: if the learner’s grammar i contains a form like (2b), no amount of comparing this form with the input will show that (2b) is wrong. The input will reveal the presence of (2a) but not the absence of (2b). Furthermore, if the learner is surrounded by input from other language learners all making the same overgeneralization, instead of being beneficial for acquisition, such input would simply reinforce certain non-target forms. It would make it even harder to discover that (2b) does not occur in English.

There are a number of cases where learners carry LI structures or rules over into L2 which present similar problems for the input hypothesis. Krashen (1983) and Krashen and Terrell (1983) claim that errors which show the influence of the mother tongue are the result of falling back on the LI due to ignorance of some L2 rule. Although I believe that the role of the LI is much more complex than this (see White 1985a, 1985b for discussion), I will, for the sake of the argument, accept their assumption. Krashen and Terrell (1983:41) state:

The cure for interference is simply acquisition—pedagogy does not need to help the acquirer fight off the effects of the first language—it only needs help the acquirer acquire the target language.

I will now outline some situations where helping the learner to acquire the target language, presumably via comprehensible input, cannot fight off the effects of the LI, because these effects lead the learner into a situation very similar to that described by Baker (1979), where it is impossible to detect a ‘gap’ in the L2 input.

One such situation concerns the question of adverb placement in English and French. There is a potential difference in ease of acquisition of certain aspects of adverb placement for English learners of French and French learners of English. In English, adverbs may not appear between the verb and direct object, whereas in French they may, as can be seen by comparing (3) and (4):

3 *John drank slowly his coffee.
4 Jean a bu lentement son café.

A native speaker of English learning French who, for whatever reason, starts off by treating French like English, will eventually get input in the form of sentences like (4) which will show that French allows adverbs in this position. That is, the acquisition of such forms presents no problems for the input hypothesis. However, the converse is problematic. A native speaker of French who assumes that English is like French and allows forms like (3) will not receive positive input to make it clear that this structure is disallowed. Rather, the input will include sentences like those in (5), indicating that adverb placement is relatively free:

5a. John drank his coffee slowly.
5b. John slowly drank his coffee.
5c. Slowly, John drank his coffee.
5d. John is slowly drinking his coffee.
(3) is simply non-occurring. There is no obvious comprehensible input that can show this, and certainly nothing in the meaning or extra-linguistic context that will help the learner to get it right.

Another example concerns the question of omitted subject pronouns in languages like Spanish and Italian. Native speakers of English learning Spanish have to discover that subjectless sentences such as (6) are allowed, whereas native speakers of Spanish learning English have to realize that subject pronouns are required, as in (7):

6 Anda muy ocupada.
   (She) is very busy.
7a. She is very busy.
7b. *Is very busy.

Again, the situation facing the English learner of Spanish provides no problem for the input hypothesis, since sentences like (6) will be heard in the input, indicating that subjects are not obligatory in Spanish. For the Spanish native speaker who assumes that sentences like (7b) are possible in English, the situation is not so clear cut. Lexical pronouns and empty pronouns are not mutually exclusive in languages like Spanish, so hearing sentences like (7a) in the English input is not sufficient to exclude sentences like (7b), if the learner treats English like Spanish with respect to the behaviour of pronouns. Again, loss of null pronouns which have wrongly been carried over into English would seem to be more problematic than acquisition of null pronouns in a language that has them. Of course, none of these non-target forms will lead to communication problems, but acquisition does not just consist of learning to communicate. It also involves the attainment of some degree of syntactic accuracy, and it is not clear how this can be achieved in cases such as these.

As mentioned above, Krashen (1983) suggests that before a new form is added to the grammar, the learner looks out for new input to confirm the hypothesis. If this input is not found, the hypothesis is abandoned. He suggests that non-target transitional forms can be discarded in this way. Could this work for the problematical cases discussed above? It would mean that learners would have to be on the look out for the presence of certain structures but for their absence, which would provide a form of indirect negative evidence that certain forms are ungrammatical in the L2. This proposal cannot be dismissed out of hand (but see Mazurkewich and White 1984 for counter-arguments). In particular, such a proposal might work in the context of a theory that severely constrains the range of possible L2 error-types. In a parameterized theory of UG, one might propose that the learner actively searches for the parameter-setting which is appropriate in the L2, and that this search could include looking for non-occurring forms. The point is that one has to have some advance idea of what these non-occurring forms might be, in order to check for them. Given that pro-drop is supposed to be a parameter within UG, such a proposal could explain how the native speakers of Spanish would eventually discover that English is not a pro-drop language—but it would not work well for other cases. Experimental evidence does not strongly support the idea that L2 learners can detect non-occurring forms. Forms like (3) are a common and persistent error among native speakers of French learning English (Sheen 1980; White 1986a). Immersion students learning French as a second language carry over forms like
(1b) from English to French, where they are not permissible, and this error is very persistent, being found even among advanced immersion students who have been exposed to French for several years (White 1986b). Immersion programmes are one of the best sources of comprehensible input, according to Krashen (1985); in spite of this, there are certain incorrect hypotheses about the L2 which immersion students seem unable to discard, suggesting that they are not necessarily able to get such indirect negative evidence from the L2 input.

It may be that there are, in fact, other subtle aspects of the positive input which will eventually serve to drive out such non-target forms. Indeed, the thrust of some recent work on learnability in L1 acquisition has been to try and discover what properties of the positive input could lead to loss of problematical overgeneralizations, given that negative evidence does not seem to be reliably available (e.g. Hyams 1983; Mazurkewich and White 1984; Pinker 1984). Whether we can identify these properties depends on our having a sophisticated theory of what properties of language are related to one another, so that one can suggest what the relevant input might be. However, for L2 acquisition, it is conceivable that in situations like these, where the learner has carried over an L1 form which is not obviously disconfirmed by the input from L2, or where the L1 has had other more subtle effects on the way the learner perceives the L2 input, correction or specific, fine-tuned grammar teaching might also be a useful source of input, a means to stimulate change and lead to a different stage in the acquisition process. In other words, the role of correction or grammar teaching would not be merely to improve the monitoring abilities of the learner. Thus, for example, it might help the learner to acquire the English adverbial system or the correct use of subject pronouns, if he or she is explicitly told that adverbs cannot go between verb and object, or that subjects are required in English. In these cases, where there are 'gaps' in the L2 input, it is unfortunately not enough to supply the correct form: one may actually have to draw the learner’s attention to the gap. I do not wish to claim by this that we should go back to teaching methods that rely heavily on grammar teaching, but only to show that we cannot rule it out automatically as a potential source of useful input to L2 acquisition, a potential trigger to grammar change in the learner’s system. Once we specify the input hypothesis as involving a theory of triggers in the input which interact with the learner’s current knowledge, both given and acquired, we see that it is not necessarily the case that non-intervention by the teacher will always lead to the most suitable input being supplied. Correction might provide a short cut, a different kind of trigger. Whether it does or not is, in fact, testable; one would expect students in these circumstances, who undergo specific teaching on specific points relevant to undetectable gaps in the input, to do better than students without such teaching. Of course, L2 learners may prove to be like L1 learners and fail to make use of corrective data. This puts an even heavier burden on the input hypothesis: we must either demonstrate that anything that an L2 learner does incorrectly can be circumvented by some other aspect of the positive input, or we must be prepared to say that totally successful L2 acquisition is never possible on such a theory. This may indeed be the case, but the point is that Krashen’s input hypothesis gives the impression that acquisition is totally unproblematic and that it is guaranteed, provided that other factors, such as the affective filter, do not intrude.
5. CONCLUSION
As currently formulated, Krashen's input hypothesis is misleading in a number of ways. It implies that by taking the hypothesis into account and providing comprehensible input, successful L2 acquisition is always possible and that where it is not possible, this is due to affective barriers alone. However, it runs into a number of difficulties, largely because of its lack of precision: where comprehensible input is interpreted as simplified input, one is in danger of providing less than adequate input to the acquirer. With its emphasis on meaning and extra-linguistic factors as crucial, the hypothesis neglects the role of system-internal changes, fails to consider cases where the input does not help at all, and underestimates the problem of the acquisition of form. Krashen is, of course, right that we should be cautious about how we manipulate the input, since we often do not know what input is relevant to a particular learner. It is true that we have, as yet, very little idea of how the input interacts with the learner's internalized system, and it might be useful to take some of Krashen's proposals not so much as a theory but as guidelines on how to behave in the absence of a theory, i.e. behave as if the input will contain structures relevant to \( i + 1 \). This does not, however, mean that we will never know precisely what factors in the input are relevant to the acquisition of any \( i + 1 \). Given sufficiently rich theories of language and of language acquisition, we may eventually be able to come up with many precise proposals in this area. In the meantime, we should not be afraid occasionally to provide input which is explicitly geared towards solving some of the problems discussed above, input either in the form of grammar teaching, of correction, or other forms of emphasis on particular structures; at worst, it will be ignored and, at best, it may trigger change in the acquisition system, where such triggers are not present in ordinary input, or are so subtle that they are hard for the second-language learner to detect. Krashen's emphasis on the input hypothesis has been useful in drawing our attention to the role of input, and to the degree to which acquisition is dependent on the learner. It would be a pity to discard the hypothesis because of its shortcomings; rather, we should aim at a far more precise characterization of the possible interactions between learner and input.

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NOTES
1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Language Acquisition Research Symposium, Utrecht, September 1985. I should like to thank participants for their comments and suggestions, as well as S. Krashen, D. Masny, and an anonymous reviewer.
2 See Gregg (1984) for similar comments. However, Gregg takes a totally negative view of Krashen's input hypothesis; he does not believe that syntactic change could ever be motivated by extra-linguistic factors either. As I have argued, I suspect that they sometimes can be involved, though they will tend to indicate that some analysis is wrong, but not that some other analysis is right.
3 Discovering that English is not a pro-drop language cannot be done straightforwardly on the basis of observing the presence of pronouns, because the non-occurrence of certain sentence types is also involved (an issue I shall return to in section 4).
4 Krashen (1985) Ch. 1, footnotes 5 and 11, recognizes that simplified input can give rise to certain problems.
5 Many of these are summarized in Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982).
6 Krashen (1985) does recognize dangers in this kind of input.
In fact, I find Krashen's dichotomy between learning and acquisition much too rigid, but I will not argue against it here. See McLaughlin (1978), Gregg (1984) for discussion.

Krashen (personal communication) points out that the acquisition of any morpheme, not just benign exceptions to rules, can be dealt with in this way. The learner who says Mary eat an apple eventually subconsciously notices a contrast between eat (the form in i) and eats (the form in the input) and replaces the former with the latter. This is true, and serves to illustrate that it is not the comprehensibility of the input but the noticing of different forms that is the issue.

Mazurkewich (1982) reports learners of ESL as accepting precisely such forms.

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