Dr. Stephen Krashen’s theory and other concepts (i.e. traditional versus modern classroom, three different teacher types, characteristics of adult learning) helps me consider personal experience of language learning and set up further my own ESL teaching beliefs. I would like to look through some of Krashen’s main hypotheses and, if other concepts are related, to apply them to my experience.

According to the Acquisition-learning hypothesis, there are two ways of developing language ability. Acquisition involves subconscious acceptance of knowledge where information is stored in the brain through the use of the communication. This happens usually to develop the native languages. Learning, on the other hand, is the conscious acceptance of knowledge concerning a language. It often focuses on the grammar and the formal language instruction. Krashen also mentioned that learners acquire parts of language in a predictable order in his Natural Order hypothesis. Certain structures of a language are easier to acquire than others. I had studied the grammar and vocabularies from the very beginning. These hypotheses bring me automatically to traditional language-learning classroom in my middle school days. I barely remember who the English teacher was: I only remember that he or she had wrote about gist of grammar points, new words and phrases, translate the sentences by sentences, and had some of students read through the text book. The teacher was more like explainer, who explained all, had me memorized the whole standardized communication patterns in the limited situation and tens of different etymons-emphasized vocabularies. I enjoyed reading loud and mimicking sounds. However, I did not like some part of grammar. It seems that some of Korean-translated grammar concepts were too complicated for me to understand. Consequently, I became to prefer speaking or writing using noun clauses with *whether* of *if* to using conditional sentences with *as if* or *as though*.

The most interesting concept is about the comprehensible input. According to Krashen, language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand. In his presentation, he had demonstrated how second language learners understood the unknown language by drawing an image with the matching explanation. I felt that this process was the most natural and effective way of acquire the language. I also see that teacher is playing the very important role here in this hypothesis. I believe that the teacher should produce natural way of English speaking environment. It means the teacher should present universal and reasonable messages with various visual aids and multimedia so that students are able to understand the messages. He also mentioned that the comprehensible input should be one step beyond the learner’s current language ability. To evaluate learner’s current language ability, teacher should interact with students constantly and involve in what students still are not comprehensible. Native language should not be involved. Students need to challenge facing as many different and new situations as possible.

In early 1990s there were many of ESL courses imported in the private language institutions in Korea. I was shocked at the learning system at that time. That totally new learning system was that there are eight to ten steps of different levels to master. I can pass or fail each level. If I fail I need to go back to previous level and cultivate my learning ability. If I pass there more harsh challenges are waiting ahead. With earnest hope that I would master English at the end of the course, I tried very hard for almost two years. All of the teachers were native speakers. They were *Involver* type in average. It means teacher’s type seems to depend on the student’s level. As I became in the advanced level, teachers turned into more *Enabler* type. They facilitated a lot of discussions and team activities taking a minimum role as advisors. It would be much closer to modern classroom. I think almost every university students learned English as a second language at the private institutes by levels more focusing on productive language skills such as speaking and writing in addition to listening and reading. I went to one of the university-affiliated language institutions, which made much seriously, account of language labs. The 30 minute-lab-time before and after class was very helpful to me for boosting up the speaking fluency. Now I know that the laboratory drilling was the part of the audio-lingual method and repetitive drills are sometimes necessary for the language learning. In 1995 when I took the original ESL program in SDSU, California, the class environment was pretty much same as one in Korea. The attitude, however, on English communication was dramatically changed; it is for rather acquiring survival skills than studying the language itself. I was challenged with significant amount of comprehensible messages to figure out during the stays in the States. The teacher was already became a life mentor whenever I asked any help.

Next two hypotheses are the Monitor hypothesis and the Affective Filter hypothesis. The one is the matter of monitoring balance between accuracy and fluency and the other filtering through the emotional barriers. According to Krashen, the teacher should know appropriate timing when to encourage students either on accuracy or on fluency based on language level of the students, the context of language use and personal goals of each student. The affective filter is a sort of personal screening system developed by various emotions such as anxiety, stress, confidence, and motivation. Teacher should create warm, safe and welcoming environment so that student can be free from making mistakes and taking risks. Frankly speaking, I still have dilemma upon the subject of the accuracy and the fluency. I used to be subconscious to other people and easily influenced by negative feelings. When my sub-consciousness and emotional ups and downs are high, I incline to be rather an accurate speaker than a fluent one.

In conclusion, my English learning environment was a half-success. From middle school years to studying abroad, I went through a traditional classroom where the teacher was a main actor and a modern ESL classroom where students were autonomous and self-directed. Even in the ESL classroom, teachers became *involver* and *enabler* depends on the level. By all the different methods from the GTM (grammar translation method) to the CLT (communicative language teaching) approach, and from the Audio-Lingual Method to the Direct Method, I was trained. Experience is better than learning; I would like to apply appropriate combination of different methods for different situations and different levels of student.

While all the experiences were worthy, some of my productive language skills are stays still the average. That is why I stated a half-success above. Speaking and writing ability is still not natural than listening and reading ability is. I like learning languages such as Chinese, Japanese, German and French. English is, however, the most passionate, elaborate, and affectionate language I have ever met. I want to be better than average. If I am confident, I would not be in today’s TESOL class. Without a certificate, I should be proud of my ability running into schools and language institutes as a teacher. I have been trying hard in learning English for more than twenty five years and my teachers did their best. What was the missing link that I had overlooked? I totally agree that teachers should be qualified with empathy, authenticity, and respect. In addition, it is even greater if they have strong enthusiasm about teaching; Enthusiasm would make them automatically be patient, be well-organized, be a good listener, give clear and positive feedback and communicate clearly. Lastly I believe there must be magic recipes that help students like me with finding a missing puzzle.

Before completing the essay, I would like to briefly introduce a book called *“Seven Rules of Miracle in English Speaking.”* I was inspired by [[1]](#endnote-1)Dr. William A. Vance, the author of the book, who had published for only Korean readers. While he focused more on business English communication, he took detailed examples of Korean styles of English speaking and kindly explained why Korean styles of English speaking were unnatural and incomprehensible.

Dr. Krashen said we all acquire language in same way. I would say we produce language in our style; in other words, I speak and write English in a way of thinking as Korean. If I speak and write English in a way of thinking as English speaker, will I become better? This is my next argument.

1. Dr. William A Vance is a director of Professional Communication Center, Yale School of Management, teaching the business communication and comparative linguistics in Yale University. He published “*Seven Rules of Miracle In English Speaking*” and “*100 Winner’s Vocabulary*” [↑](#endnote-ref-1)