11 Individual variation in the use of the monitor[1]

Text

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In this chapter I will attempt to sketch a general model for adult second language performance, and what contributions this model makes in characterizing individual variation in second language use.

In previous reports (Krashen, 1975, 1976), the Monitor Model was represented as in Figure 1. Here, the initiation of utterances in adult second language performance occurs according to what the performer has **acquired** through natural language use, that is, by rules internalized in ways similar to the way children acquire language: subconsciously, and without overt teaching on the part of native speakers. Acquisition, then, is a technical term that refers to the "creative construction" process found in both child first and second language acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1972) and the model presented here claims that adults have access to this process as well.

When conditions permit, and when performers are concerned with the form of their utterances, the output of the acquired system may be inspected and altered by a **learned** system, often before the utterance is actually spoken. Learned language consists of conscious mental representations of linguistic rules and is the result of either a formal language learning situation or some kind of self-study program. Krashen and Seliger (1975) have suggested that formal learning situa-
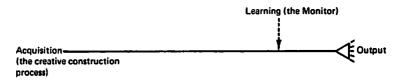
Figure 1. The Monitor Model for adult second language performance.

tions are characterized by the presence of feedback, or error correction, absent in acquisition environments, and "rule isolation," the presentation of artificial linguistic environments that introduce just one new aspect of grammar at a time.[2]

"Primary linguistic data" are utilized differently by language acquisition and language learning: Learners may use language data as a way of practicing or testing consciously learned rules (deductive) or as a data source for inducing the forms of rules, while for language acquisition, or the creative construction process, input is thought to activate the operation of a "language acquisition device [Chomsky, 1965]."

Most second language teaching methods designed by adults presume that language learning is at least the central if not the only means available to adults for internalizing linguistic rules. There is, however, suggestive evidence that adults can and do acquire (for details, see Krashen, 1975, 1977). An important part of this data that also reveals the operation of the Monitor Model deals with adult performance on "grammatical morphemes," or functors, a line of research begun by Brown (1973) for first language acquisition. It has been found that in certain situations (usually on oral tests), adult subjects show the same "accuracy order" for grammatical morphemes as do children acquiring English as a second language (child data from Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974, 1975; adult data from Bailey, Madden, & Krashen, 1974, and Larsen-Freeman, 1975). Also, groups of adult ESL acquirers with different first languages agree with each other with respect to accuracy order. When pencil and paper tasks are given, however—tests that encourage a focus on form and that require more processing time—this agreement breaks down, and overall accuracy rises (Krashen, Sferlazza, Feldman, & Fathman, 1976; Larsen-Freeman, 1975). This result can be explained quite easily in terms of the Monitor Model: Tests that involve editing one's output bring in language learning as well as language acquisition. In tests such as the Bilingual Syntax Measure (Burt, Dulay, & Hernández, 1975), however, used in the Dulay and Burt child studies and the Bailey *et al.* and Larsen-Freeman adult studies (oral part), where the focus is on communication and where processing time is limited, subjects are not able to access their conscious grammatical knowledge and are thus dependent on what has been ac-

[2]Optimal acquisition environments may also contain rule isolation, or simplified input. See Cazden (1972); Snow (1972); Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975).

quired. Their error patterns therefore resemble what is seen in younger acquirers, children acquiring English as a second language. These younger acquirers, for the most part, utilize just language acquisition in production.[3] The similarity seen among performers reflects the uniformity of the language acquisition process in everyone (Brown, 1973; Ervin-Tripp, 1973; Slobin, 1973). When more processing time is available, the more idiosyncratic learned grammar shows through.

INDIVIDUAL VARIATION IN THE USE OF THE MONITOR

Given the model just described, one might suppose that individual second language performers would vary with respect to the extent to which they utilize the Monitor in second language production. At one extreme end of the continuum, some performers might utilize conscious knowledge of the target language whenever possible. Extreme Monitor users might, in fact, be so concerned with editing their output to make it conform to their conscious rules that fluency would be seriously hampered. At the other end of the continuum, we may find those who almost never monitor their output.

These sorts of individuals do exist, and their case histories are revealing, both as to the theoretical question regarding the operation of the Monitor Model, and with respect to the practical question of what role instruction should play in helping second language performers improve.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MONITOR USERS

Before describing the extreme cases, we shall first turn to some typical instances of Monitor utilization in adult second language performance. Several informal case studies will be presented to illustrate some general characteristics of Monitor users, namely:

1. Successful Monitor users edit their second language output when it does not interfere with communication.
2. This editing results in variable performance, that is, we see different types and amounts of errors under different conditions. Monitoring generally improves accuracy levels, and as we have noted above, under edited conditions, where attention is on form, we no longer see the child's "natural" difficulty order.
3. Monitor users show an overt concern with "correct" language, and regard their unmonitored speech and writing as "careless."

[3]Older children may also be able to self-correct by rule (Cazden, 1975; Hatch, 1976). Their conscious grammar may, however, be less extensive than that used in performance by the adult Monitor user.

CASE STUDIES OF MONITOR USERS

An interesting case study, illustrating some of the points mentioned above, is P, a fairly typical successful Monitor user studied by Krashen and Pon (1975). P was a native speaker of Chinese in her 40s, who had begun to learn English sometime in her 20s when she came to the United States. About 5 years before she was studied by Krashen and Pon, she had enrolled in college, and had graduated with an "A" average.

Krashen and Pon studied P's casual, everyday language production. Observers, native speakers of English (usually P's son), simply recorded her errors from utterances she produced in normal family living or in friendly conversational situations. Immediately after an utterance containing an error was recorded, it was presented to the subject. The data were gathered over a 3-week period and about 80 errors were tabulated.

Upon considering P's self-correction behavior, the investigators came to what was then an unexpected conclusion:

> We were quite surprised to note . . . that our subject was able to correct nearly every error in the corpus (about 95%) when the errors were presented to her after after their commission. In addition, in nearly every case she was able to describe the grammatical principle involved and violated. Another interesting finding was that for the most part the rules involved were simple, "first level" rules (e.g. omission of the third person singular ending, incorrect irregular past tense form, failure to make the verb agree with the subject in number (is/are), use of 'much' with countable nouns, etc.) [p. 126].

The fact that the vast majority of P's errors were self-correctable suggested that "she had a conscious knowledge of the rules" but did not choose to apply this knowledge. Further evidence that this is the case "is our observation that the subject is able to write a virtually error-free English.... In writing, and in careful speech, she utilizes her conscious linguistic knowledge of English, while in casual speech she may be too rushed or preoccupied with the message to adjust her output [p. 126]."

P thus illustrates the general characteristics of the successful Monitor user noted above. She is able to communicate well in both Monitor free and edited situations, applying the Monitor when it is appropriate to focus on form. Her performance is variable, in that she makes some errors in unmonitored speech, while her written output is quite close to the native speaker's norm. In a sense, she is able to achieve the illusion of the native speaker's syntactic level of performance by efficient, accurate monitoring.

Cohen and Robbins (1976) describe two more cases like this in their in-depth study of learner characteristics. Ue-lin, like P, can self-correct successfully, and describes her errors as "careless." She reports that she likes to be corrected and has the practice of going over teacher's corrections on her written work. Her background includes formal training in English.

Eva, also described by Cohen and Robbins, is also a Monitor user. Eva made the following statement, which appears to indicate a conscious awareness of Monitor use: "Sometimes I would write something the way I speak. We say a word more or less in a careless way. But if I take my time, sometimes go over it, that would be much easier. . . . Whenever I go over something or take my time, then the rules come to my mind [p. 58]." This statement is easily translated into the vocabulary of the Monitor Model. "Sometimes I would write something the way I speak" reflects the use of the acquired system in language production when monitoring is not involved.[4] Eva's comments about the "carelessness" of her spoken language, which are similar to Ue-lin's statement, simply reflect the fact that ordinary casual speech is usually unmonitored. "The rules come to [her] mind" when she focuses on the form of her utterance ("whenever I go over something"), rather than just on its function as communication.

Until the creative construction process has completed its mission in the adult second language performer, the use of monitoring in edited language can certainly be an aid. The world often demands accurate language, even from second language users, in just those domains where Monitor use is most possible—in the written language—and a clear idea of linguistic rules can be a real asset for the performer. An overconcern with correctness, however, can be a problem. The overuser may be so concerned with form that he or she is unable to speak with any fluency at all.

THE OVERUSER

Stafford and Covitt (in press) present an instructive case of a Monitor overuser: S, a Finnish speaker who, like P, knows many of the rules of English, but who is often unable to communicate in speech. While her written English is quite accurate, Stafford and Covitt remark that "she speaks very little, because she tries to remember and use grammar rules before speaking." S's self-correction behavior reveals her lack of faith in her acquired knowledge of English. Stafford and Covitt report that she generally does not trust her intuitions about English syntax but relies on conscious rules. S describes her own situation

[4]We would expect that when second language performers actually do "write the way they speak" they would show a "natural order" (= child's difficulty order) for grammatical morpheme performance. Krashen, Butler, and Birnbaum (1977) have recently found just this. Adult ESL students were asked to write compositions and were instructed in such a way that their focus was on communication and not on form. Analysis of the eight grammatical morphemes studied by other experimenters showed a difficulty order that was quite similar to that found by Bailey *et al.*, Larsen-Freeman, and Dulay and Burt. Also, in agreement with previous studies, there was no first language influence on the difficulty order. This demonstrates that it is not the modality or particular elicitation instrument that determines difficulty order. What is crucial is whether or not natural communication is emphasized.

as follows: "I feel bad . . . when I put words together and I don't know nothing about the grammar."

Birnbaum (1976) characterizes the speech of Hector, another adult second language performer and ESL student who shows signs of overuse, as follows: "In a segment of conversation that lasted slightly less than fifteen minutes, there is not a single lengthly utterance that is not filled with pauses, false starts, repetitions, and other speech repairs. . . . There are over 69 . . . instances of repair (not counting pauses)." We are not surprised to learn that Hector's written English, his class compositions "produced in a situation where extreme monitoring is possible—are among the best in his section."

Why are some people overusers? Does the overconcern with correctness revealed in second language performance extend to other nonlinguistic domains? Birnbaum provides a clue, noting that "Hector's personality is an accurate predictor of his reliance on the monitor. He tends to be a quiet, intellectual, and somewhat introverted person . . . ."

Let us look at certain personality changes that take place at the close of the "critical period for language acquisition" as a clue to the overuser. I have suggested elsewhere (Krashen, 1975) that the Monitor may owe its source to Piaget's Formal Operations stage (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). At around 12 years, the adolescent is able to think in purely abstract terms for the first time, that is, he is able to relate abstract concepts to other abstractions, dealing with them as if they were concrete objects. This new ability may allow the adolescent to become more conscious of abstract grammatical rules.

Elkind (1970) has suggested that profound psychological changes that occur at this time may be related to this cognitive change. He suggests that formal operations permits the adolescent "to conceptualize the thought of other people." This may lead the adolescent to the false conclusion that other people are not only thinking about him but are focusing on just what he considers to be his inadequacies. He assumes that "others are as admiring or as critical of him as he is himself." This leads to the feeling of self-consciousness and vulnerability that one often sees in adolescents. In the case of the overuser, this fear of making what one perceives to be an error may extend into the linguistic domain and may remain in the individual long after adolescence.

THE UNDERUSER

At the other extreme are adult second language performers who do not seem to use a monitor to any extent, even when conditions encourage it. Such performers, like first language acquirers, appear to be uninfluenced by most error correction and do not usually utilize conscious linguistic knowledge in second language performance.

In previous reports (Krashen, 1975; see also Krashen, 1977), the case of Hung was discussed in this regard. Hung, described by Cohen and Robbins (1976), is, for the most part, unable to self-correct his own errors in written English and does not have a conscious knowledge of the rules he breaks. When he does attempt to self-correct, he reports that he does so "by feel" ("It sounds just right"), reflecting reliance on his acquired competence. Hung reports that his English background is nearly entirely "submersion." He came to the United States at 10 and did not receive formal training in ESL. He also reports that he does not like "grammar."

Stafford and Covitt describe several cases of Monitor underusers, and make the interesting point that underusers may pay lip service to the importance of linguistic rules but in reality may hardly use them at all. First consider the case of V, an ESL student whom they depict as "verbal and energetic." V values the study of grammar very highly. On a questionnaire administered by Stafford and Covitt, he wrote, "Grammar is the key to every language." V thinks he uses conscious rules in performance—"When I know a grammar rule, I try to apply it"—but careful questioning reveal that V actually knows few rules and self-corrects "by feel." The following exchanges, taken from a conversation between V and one of the investigators, illustrate this:

Int.: [When you write a composition] ... do you think of grammar rules? Do you think "Should I have used the present tense here or would the present continuous be better or....

V: I don't refer that to the books and all that, you know. I just refer it to this uh, my judgment and ... sensing it if I'm writing it right or wrong. Because I really don't know ... what where exactly how ... the grammatical rules work out.

Int.: Do you correct yourself when you talk?
V: Yeah, I watch out for that very good.
Int.: How do you know you made a mistake?
V: ... it doesn't sound right ... sometimes what I said I feel it that it doesn't register the way I want it.

Int.: Do you think grammar rules are useful?
V: Useful? Yeah. When you want to write they are very very useful.
Int.: But you don't use them when you write.
V: Yeah, I know. I don't use them ... I don't know how to use them!

Another case described by Stafford and Covitt is I, an Israeli woman who has studied English formally and who also values conscious rules highly but utilizes them very little in performance. She is described as being "very friendly ... loves to talk to people, and is not embarrassed to make mistakes." This

outgoing, uninhibited personality type seems to be shared by V, discussed above, and is in contrast to the self-conscious, introverted personality of the overuser. I remarks that even in written performance "first of all I listen to myself as it sounds. I mean I write it and then I see if it sounds correct." Also, "I listen to things, I don't know the rules. Really, I don't know them." On the other hand, she feels that conscious rules are necessary to speak "correctly." Interestingly, however, she advises a nonrule approach to second language study: "I think when you are a foreigner in a country and you need the language just to speak it daily, you need an audio-visual course, and not, not grammar ."

While students like I and V may not directly profit from a rule-type approach to second language, they think they will, and this fact may be a factor in lesson planning.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Table 1 summarizes the sorts of individual variation discussed here. While this certainly is not an exhaustive listing of every kind of variation seen in adult second language classrooms, it may cover some common types.

Table 1. Individual Variation in Monitor Use

Monitor user	Spoken style	Uses conscious rules?	Personality type
Optimal	−Hesitant	Yes	
Overuser	+Hesitant	Yes	Self-conscious
Underuser	−Hesitant	No[a]	Outgoing

[a] May pay lip service to value of rules (see text).

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