



plenary, and was packed to the gunwales. Like Judge, she also mentioned that in some of her research, it appears as though giving book summaries or mini-reports in Japanese was successful—perhaps more so than the same task in an L2. In light of the recent questions raised about translation in the classroom and the role of L1 in the classroom, the role of L1 may well need some serious reconsideration.

For me, personally, however, the most significant moment came upon realizing one of the things that makes ER events so unique. In his presentation, Krashen suggested that, to some extent, he was preaching to the choir. Most people listening already have some experience and faith in ER. In many events at JALT, while the goal is to teach English, approaches may vary (and reasonably so). While this is still true to an extent within the ER SIG, there is perhaps more common ground among participants. Most of us believe that reading a lot is an important part of the language acquisition process, and that reading in general is important. We may disagree on the role of testing, or whether reading should be done in or out of class, but everyone agrees that input and reading are important.

Although I almost didn't attend, the seminar left me optimistic. Besides everything else, Krashen tells us that looking at longevity, three important factors are reading, bilingualism, and coffee. I am not just helping my students learn a language. It seems I might be helping them live longer! Now if I can get the school to provide funding for coffee as well as the library . . .



## Meeting Dr. Krashen

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I'm not sure if there is anyone who has had a greater impact on applied linguistics than Stephen Krashen. There are people who wander in and out of fashion; there are academics who have made a pretty big footprint in a certain area of the field; but if you have ever written a paper on Second Language Acquisition, you will have cited Krashen.

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I've been interviewing researchers, writers and other leading lights in English language education for the last three years or so (you can see the videos at my website [www.livesofteachers.com](http://www.livesofteachers.com)), and when I saw Dr. Krashen was coming to town I was very keen to talk to him. His trip to Japan took in several cities but his main engagement was at the ER SIG's 5th Extensive Reading Seminar, held at Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Nagoya.

Dr. Krashen has increasingly seen extensive reading, or free voluntary reading, as a great source of comprehensible input. He carries a foreign language novel with him at all times and reads whenever he has a moment, placing the most emphasis on reading material which is compelling enough to make the reader forget he or she is reading in a foreign language. It's a message which fits well with that of the SIG and the seminar.

My preparation for this interview was broadly similar to any other—I tried to read as much of the interviewee's work, and as many critiques of his work, as possible. I wrote down questions as they occurred to me whilst reading, and invited questions from friends and colleagues. Here we hit a snag. Stephen Krashen has had a long, prolific, and divisive academic career and it appears that his theories are not universally respected. Before we go any further, we should outline exactly what those theories are.

Starting in the 1970s, Krashen put together what became known as "The Five Hypotheses", five theories about the way we learn languages which had an immense impact on the nascent field of applied linguistics at the time.

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis which draws a distinction between language gained through usage (as with children learning their first language) and the process of studying language rules.
2. The Natural Order Hypothesis which claims that one

cannot acquire a structure unless a fixed set of other structures have already been acquired.

3. The Monitor Hypothesis, which addresses our ability to self-correct our output based on what we have learned.

4. The Input Hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible input (language slightly above our level referred to as "+1") is all a learner needs to acquire language.

5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, which describes how negative emotional states like anxiety or discomfort prevent acquisition from taking place.

The combination of common-sensical simplicity and neat metaphor meant that these ideas were taken up enthusiastically by many language teachers. There have, of course, been criticisms. Opponents claim that Krashen's research is not sufficiently rigorous. His terms are insufficiently defined, or undefinable.

I was curious to know whether Dr. Krashen had known in the 70s how important his ideas would be, even decades later. His answer was enlightening.

"The moment [the idea] hit there was a felt sense that I knew it was right," he said. He told his colleague Larry Hyman, "I think I've found the answer, this is it, this is like finding the structure of DNA."

Given this strength of feeling, it's unsurprising that when I asked Dr. Krashen whether he felt his hypotheses still stood up, he was unshakable. Although he is, and always has been, absolutely clear that these are hypotheses, he firmly believes that nothing has disproved them yet.

As much research as we do, teachers do need to take a certain leap of faith in deciding what will help their learners learn. Krashen mentioned in our interview the "strong felt sense" which prevents some people from accepting his ideas, and which he has to acknowledge in himself in continuing research. Certainly, the five hypotheses have enabled many teachers to conceptualize language acquisition in helpful and understandable ways. Whether some of those concepts are clearly defined or accurately researched may be moot, although the fact that Krashen himself believes his work to stand up to scientific scrutiny suggests his work should be assessed that way. Personally, I am not sure that we can fully capture what it means to learn a language, as the combinations of variables are almost infinite.

The reason that Krashen has attracted such opprobrium from certain quarters, though, is his willingness to stick his head above the parapets on politicized topics such as bilingual education and

testing. He is opposed to a reliance on phonics in early reading teaching, something I pressed him on when we met. So long as a parent reads aloud to a child "your kids have no choice but to become highly literate [ . . . ] it's inevitable". According to Krashen, phonics, beyond the basics of consonant sounds and the alphabet, has little effect on reading comprehension skills. To governments and publishing houses highly invested in phonics-based reading programs, this is rather unpalatable. As a teacher and a parent, I will admit some confusion, but I do respect Dr. Krashen for suggesting that there may be other ways to learn.

## Links

If you want to learn more about Stephen Krashen's work, you can start by watching the interview <http://www.livesofteachers.com/2012/07/10/an-interview-with-dr-stephen-krashen/>

Frankfurt International School summarizes Krashen's work very neatly <http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/krashen.htm>

As does the website of renowned linguist Vivian Cook <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/Krashen.htm>

Scott Thornbury asks us if Krashen is still relevant. The blog post itself is succinct, and the comments, including those from Krashen himself, enlightening. <http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/2009/12/27/k-is-for-krashen/>

This open letter from a well-known British children's author highlights why government reading policies relying on phonics may not be the best way forward. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jun/04/michael-rosen-phonics-screen-test>

This highly critical article of Krashen's involvement in bilingual education is not particularly credible, but does demonstrate how vitriolic political discourse can be. <http://www.angelfire.com/az/english4thechildren/krashen.html>

You can read a number of articles about each of his areas of interest on Krashen's website. <http://www.sdkrashen.com>

I would like to thank the ER SIG for organizing the seminar, Sugiyama Jogakuen for hosting it, and of course Stephen Krashen for his time and his thoughtful answers to all my questions.