

Language acquisition and **language learning** are two distinct but related concepts in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), most famously distinguished by linguist Stephen Krashen. Acquisition is a subconscious, natural process, while learning is a conscious, formal one.

Language Acquisition

This is a **subconscious process** similar to how children acquire their first language. It happens naturally through exposure to the language in meaningful, communicative contexts. The focus is on understanding and conveying messages, not on the grammatical rules themselves. For example, a child acquires their native language by hearing it from their parents and environment, and they instinctively grasp what sounds "right" without being able to explain the rules. In second language acquisition, this can happen when a learner is immersed in a new language environment and has to use the language to communicate in real-world situations, such as buying groceries or making friends.

Language Learning

This is a **conscious process** that typically takes place in a formal setting, like a classroom. It involves deliberate study, memorizing vocabulary lists, and explicitly learning grammatical rules. A learner consciously tries to understand the "about" the language. For example, a student might learn that in Spanish, the verb "ser" is used for permanent characteristics while "estar" is used for temporary states. This is a conscious effort to apply rules to produce correct language.

The Relationship Between the Two

Krashen's **Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis** suggests that these two systems are independent. He posits that **acquired language** is what we use for spontaneous communication, while **learned language** functions as a "monitor" or "editor" to check and correct our output. This monitor can only be used when a learner has sufficient time, is focused on correctness, and knows the specific rule. Therefore, Krashen argues that acquisition is the more important and primary process for achieving fluency.

Many theories of SLA, including Krashen's, emphasize the importance of **comprehensible input**—language that is slightly above the learner's current level of proficiency but still understandable. This input, often provided through natural interaction, is what fuels the acquisition process and allows learners to move from one level of proficiency to the next.