3. THE MONITOR HYPOTHESIS

While the acquisition-learning distinction claims that two separate processes coexist in the adult, it does not state how they are used in second language performance. The Monitor hypothesis posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Normally, acquisition "initiates" our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after is has been "produced" by the acquired system. This can happen before we speak or write, or after (self-correction). Figure 2.1 models this process.
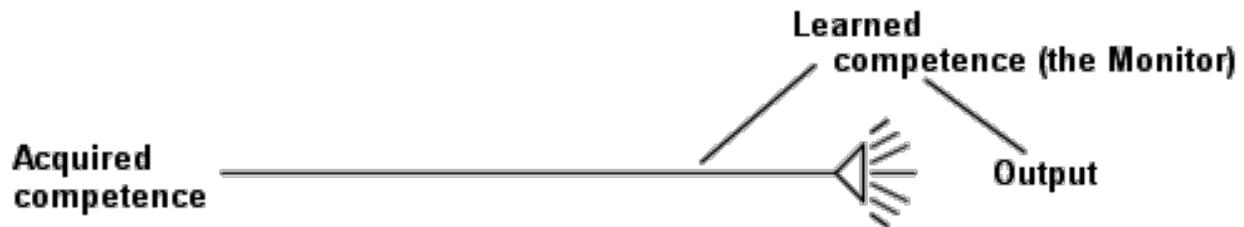

Fig. 2.1. Acquisition and learning in second langauge production.
Conscious learning is available only as a "Monitor", which can alter the output of the acquired system before or after the utterance is actually spoken or written. It is the acquired system which initiates normal, fluent speech utterances.

The Monitor hypothesis implies that formal rules, or conscious learning, play only a limited role in second language performance. These limitations have become even clearer as research has proceeded in the last few years. This research, reviewed in Chapter IV, strongly suggests that second language performers can use conscious rules only when three conditions are met. These conditions are necessary and not sufficient, that is, a performer may not fully utilize his conscious grammar even when all three conditions are met. I list these conditions here, with a brief description. We will discuss them in greater detail in Chapter IV:

(i) Time. In order to think about and use conscious rules effectively, a second language performer needs to have sufficient time. For most people, normal conversation does not allow enough time to think about and use rules. The over-use of rules in conversation can lead to trouble, i.e. a hesitant style of talking and inattention to what the conversational partner is saying.

(ii) Focus on form. To use the Monitor effectively, time is not enough. The performer must also be focussed on form, or thinking about correctness (Dulay and Burt, 1978). Even when we have time, we may be so involved in what we are saying that we do not attend to how we are saying it.

(iii) Know the rule. This is a very formidable requirement. Linguistics has taught us that the structure of language is extremely complex, and they claim to have described only a fragment of the best known languages. We can be sure that our students are exposed only to a small part of the total grammar of the language, and we know that even the best students do not learn every rule they are exposed to.

Source: Krashen, Stephen D. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press. Excerpt from (2009) First Internet edition, pp. 22-23.