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# The Noticing Hypothesis In Language Theories

## 1.1 Introduction

The Noticing Hypothesis is a language learning theory, proposed by Richard Schmidt in 1990. According to hypothesis, conscious learning is necessary for second language improvement and competence. In more simple words, people learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to. In strong version of the hypothesis, it is stated that input must become intake because it is essential starting point. In weak version, it is stated that it is very helpful. In this text, I will mention the factors that caused the occurrence of the hypothesis, and what it encountered ideologically. Finally, I will analyze the empirical study of mine, with the purpose of better understanding to the hypothesis.

## 1.2 Background & Origin

In 1980s, there were many studies and theories that emphasized on the unconscious process of language learning. The two case studies that Schmidt carried out in those years created some questions about that assumptions. He demonstrates these two case studies as evidence: The first case study was about an adult learner of English, Wes. Schmidt documented his acquisition process of English for several years. Wes was repeatedly making errors and he was not able to recognize his mistakes. One possible explanation for this was lack of noticing. The conclusion was that only the process of unconscious learning of a language is probably not possible because noticing is also necessary for it.

The second case study was his own learning. He was learning Portuguese during his stay in Brazil for five months. He took a class for five weeks, and the rest of his learning the language was through interaction with native speakers. The results of this study showed that explanations done in classroom was very useful, but practice in communicative input were more important. In addition, it was also found that some forms in input were still not acquired until they were consciously noticed. This also seems as the origin of the Noticing Hypothesis.

## 1.3 Other opinions

There are some studies that are supportive of the Noticing Hypothesis. One of them is Ronald P. Leow's, he made a study about noticing and he found that those who displayed more awareness learned more than who displayed less awareness. The other one is Alison Mackey who made another study about the hypothesis. The findings of this study were similar to previous one: learners who showed more attention developed more than those who showed less attention.

Despite the studies that supports The Noticing Hypothesis, it has also encountered some objections. One objection was that attention does not play a direct role in acquisition. Another objection suggested by John Truscott was that 'noticing is related to metalinguistic knowledge but not to linguistic knowledge (competence), to learning but not to acquisition'. On one hand, I think these objections to the Noticing Hypothesis cannot be turned down with ease; some even sounds like right. On the other hand, I believe in that paying attention and being aware of what

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we learn contributes to our learning and acquiring the language.

#### 1.4. Summary

In summary, I can say that the Noticing Hypothesis is a language theory suggested by Richard Schmidt. It has its origin from the two case studies he studied in the 1980s. In those years, the theories of the unconscious process of language learning were mainly popular. Schmidt questioned the underlying reasons behind the consistent grammatical errors in the proficient language use of a learner of English. We did not realize the right form of his mistakes in the language he produced. The other study was his own learning Portuguese language. He was keeping a journal and compared them with the recordings of the conversations in Portuguese between him and his assistant. The main finding was that even if a language form has frequency, acquisition does not actualize if it is not noticed by the learner.

The hypothesis claims that learners cannot learn the grammatical features of a language unless they notice them. Actually, noticing alone is not enough to acquire a second language; it is just a primary point for the beginning the process. The answer for how learners can apply the Noticing Hypothesis into their learning process can be using 'learning strategies'. Learning strategies are various and appeal to every learner specially. Their attention and awareness to learning process are promoted when learners use their own interests and tactics.

There have been several definitions made for 'noticing' and debates over it since the Noticing Hypothesis occurred. Some people have recognized this hypothesis and made some researches and studies to support and to expand it. On the other side, it has encountered some contradictions as well. In the next part of this text, I will conduct a study for better understanding and clarification of the hypothesis.

#### 2. Study

In this study, I prepared 10 questions and asked them to 28 people. The questions are about the Noticing Hypothesis, and I believe in that they are appropriate for the subject. Participants are all language learners. They consist of Polish, Ukrainian, and Turkish people.

This empirical questionnaire study shows briefly that even though there are some who show difference, great part of the learners think they are better learners when they give their attention, or they learn the things in an interesting way for them, which means they use learning strategies for better learning. This can also be seen from the answers for 8, 9, and 10. questions. When looked at 1, 6 and 7. questions, the majority of the participants agree with that their learning actualises better when they give their attention. When looked at 2 and 3. questions, participants' answers show inequality: in both questions, the major answer is neither agree nor disagree. That means, most of the participants don't have precise idea for their listening competence and that whether memorizing is enough or not. Even though most of the answers seem as complementary to the noticing hypothesis, the question 5 differs from the rest. Great part of the participants agree with their subconscious learning, which contrasts with the hypothesis.

#### 3. Conclusion

There has been nearly 30 years since the Noticing Hypothesis appeared first in language

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theories, It has both defenders and contradictors, As I can conclude, the hypothesis is still open to be more clear and to be expanded. I can see that conclusion more clearly from my research and questionnaire study. Even though I think the hypothesis is right and I see myself as one of the defenders of it, I still accept the existence and trueness of subconscious learning process.

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