Krashen's Input Hypothesis Revisited: Current Perspectives and Future Directions

Siqi Chen[1], Zihan Hu[2], Siqi Kang[3] and Aolin Wang[4, *]

[1]Department of English, Harbin Normal University, Harbin, China
[2]The High School Affiliated to the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Ningbo, China
[3]School of English and Translation Studies, Chengdu Institute Sichuan International Studies University, Chengdu, China
[4]Department of Translation, Central South University of Forestry and Technology, Changsha, China
*Corresponding author: 20215481@csuft.edu.cn

Abstract:

The input hypothesis is the core part of Krashen's language acquisition theory and is an important second language acquisition theory. The discussion of Krashen's input hypothesis is of practical significance to current English teaching. In the application of English teaching, the research on Krashen's input hypothesis focuses on its advantages, while the research on its disadvantages is rare. In such a context, this paper synthesizes both the advantages and disadvantages of Krashen's input hypothesis in English teaching. It focuses on exploring the shortcomings to put forward specific suggestions to help English teaching. This paper summarizes the application of Krashen's input hypothesis in English teaching and describes the concept of Krashen's input hypothesis in English listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Based on these discussions, this study puts forward some concrete suggestions for English teaching. By adopting the principles of Input theory, teachers can design more effective teaching activities and provide richer language input, thereby facilitating students' language acquisition.

Keywords: Input hypothesis; i+1; comprehensible input; second language acquisition.

1. Introduction

Language learning begins with comprehensible language input. According to Krashen, comprehensible language input is the most fundamental method for language acquisition; this is a prerequisite for language acquisition. The understanding here is not the understanding of form but the understanding of meaning [1]. Therefore, the language the student is exposed to must be slightly beyond their level of comprehension. Krashen's input hypothesis means learners will generate second-language input when they receive input slightly above their ability level based on their comprehension levels. After receiving the second-language input, learners focus on comprehending the messages and meanings to acquire the second language. 'i+1' is a formula used to explain this situation. 'i' represents the learners' current comprehension levels, while '1' represents materials suitable for individuals with higher knowledge. When learners gain a certain amount of knowledge and incorporate it into their comprehension, it creates the situation of 'i+1'. Thus, learners will acquire a second language. Suppose the language input the learner receives is either too basic or too difficult to grasp, or it is

much above their current level, 'i+2', or it is even closer to or lower than their current ability level, 'i+0'. In that case, they are not receiving enough understandable input [2]. Krashen states that the input hypothesis is represented by the formula 'i+1' [3].

The following qualities should be present in the perfect input:

(1) The information provided is comprehensible. Unintelligible language input just serves to divert the student.

(2) The use of input makes learning engaging and relevant.

(3) The input has no grammatical order because its purpose is to aid acquisition rather than learning. The secret to learning a language is to get enough understandable input. The only way to acquire a deeper language is to have a lot of comprehensible input [3].

2. Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Four Skills

2.1 Listening

The primary source of vocabulary and spelling is understandable input. Additionally, more readable written

and auditory input promotes language learning. Hui, He, Hu, and Yuan's pertinent research demonstrates that the instructional materials set up oral training in Part B and listening practice in Part A, consistent with the "i+1" theory [4]. As speaking is more difficult than listening, teachers typically start their lessons by having students listen to language resources before teaching them how to communicate effectively. This aligns with the "listening, speaking, reading, and writing" learning cycle. According to Li, applying Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that instructors should assign hearing materials just slightly above the students' present competency level in the context of college English listening in China. To promote language acquisition, this method seeks to challenge students while ensuring they can still comprehend most of the material [5]. If students' listening level is CET4, they can understand one hundred percent of the listening materials. When teachers provide materials at the same level, students cannot learn new vocabulary. This will maintain their current level and hinder language acquisition in the future. If teachers provide higher-level listening materials, students will encounter vocabulary to learn and understand. Students study the new words and incorporate them into their knowledge. This is an effective way for students to expand their vocabulary and promote their learning of a second language. Krashen confirms that the input of listening forms correlates with improved vocabulary development [6].

2.2 Speaking

Regarding oral English teaching, the accumulation and use of vocabulary are influenced by the students' English proficiency. To improve students' oral English proficiency, teachers should provide vocabulary slightly higher than the students' current oral English level and correct students' pronunciation and intonation. This way, the students can incorporate the vocabulary slightly higher than their current level into their oral vocabulary accumulation. This is by Krashen's input hypothesis theory. Based on the current level of students' oral vocabulary, the teacher provides students with vocabulary conducive to improving their oral English level and promoting the understandable input of students' new oral vocabulary so as to improve their oral English ability. Regarding the input hypothesis as the significant point of analysis, it is not difficult to see that it occupies a dominant place in modern English teaching. The teaching structure at this stage is more inclined to understand the input. For instance, introducing some background information and the sources of concepts into the new curriculum could pave the way for reading content. Besides, utilizing the "i+1" formula flexibly based on students' existing knowledge will improve the diffi-

culty of the input source successively. Moreover, teachers could fully utilize students' previous lexical resources and subconsciously introduce them to more complicated and challenging questions based on instructing them with core vocabulary related to the article. Many forms of educational assistance could also be used during this process (pictures, videos, or more immersive 3-D technologies) to facilitate the understanding of texts. This approach is not confined to a large number of repetitive tasks at the same capacity level or humdrum subject content, but it strengthens students' motivation to a great extent. It constructs intimate relationships between all kinds of knowledge and becomes a relatively effective method for teaching L2.

2.3 Reading

Teachers might force kids to read in certain circumstances, according to Li and Wang [7]. Students who read in context can better comprehend the subject matter, the writer's intentions, and how to apply what they have read to real-world situations [7]. Students can grasp English culture by using specific social context, significant context connections, and their creativity to make sense of the novel's people, events, and plots. For students' mastery of the content to become unnoticeable, teachers can also supply them with materials like descriptions, photos, meeting minutes, advertising, etc. This will expose them to as many genuine language application domains as feasible [7]. Take, for example, the warning up section in the first part of the Compulsory 1 Unit 4 earthquake in "Experimental Textbooks for Ordinary High Schools · English" of People's Education Press. First and foremost, the instructor must ensure that the term "shock" surpasses the students' cognitive capabilities. Subsequently, the educator can employ the following strategies to facilitate the students' vocabulary comprehension during the reading process. The author will not immediately explain the meaning of "shock" or provide a picture description. Rather, begin with the description that follows: People were horrified to learn that the little girl's stepmother frequently beat her. Everyone in the vicinity was taken aback by the surprising news, even her father, who was employed overseas. Since some students could not provide a specific response at this point, the author will provide a photo of the horrified students. At this point, some students quickly responded that it was "shock" [8].

2.4 Writing

Yu Miao's study, "A Study of the Implications of Krashen's Input Theory in Teaching of Writing in Rural Middle School," reveals that students' vocabulary significantly improves, and their sentence structure and grammar knowledge are better consolidated. Moreover, they have

a good composition structure and develop good writing habits after receiving a large amount of engaging grammar input related to writing slightly higher than the current level. Overall, pupils' language skills have grown, and their ability to write in English has improved to varied degrees [9].

Comprehensible input is particularly important for language learning. According to Zheng, the input theory established the significance of understandable input for learners [10]. It prevents the student from concentrating on the intricate patterns and ideas of the language, which could strain the students – especially when they first interact with it.

3. Advantages of Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Understandable language materials positively affect learners, but some researchers have found that Krashen's input hypothesis has certain limitations. Robert Patrick mentioned in his paper that his second language acquisition project on Latin, which he has led since 2014, has successfully practiced the Krashen input hypothesis [11]. Robert teaches in pure Latin with corresponding body movements to describe the corresponding situation, and he does not encourage grammar teaching by analyzing the grammar syllabus and identifying parts of speech [11]. The data shows that by the end of 2018, this project had achieved a relatively high retention rate compared with other second language acquisition projects in the same period (between 40% and 60%, while the retention rate of teaching projects that consciously study through pronunciation, morphology, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics traditionally is only 1 to 10%). The pass rate of students in the test has increased [11]. This experiment proves that comprehensible input based on Krashen's input theory positively impacts students' learning motivation and performance through simple and interesting oral and body language. From this experiment, it can be inferred that more profound subconscious memory is formed by comprehensible input, and integrating the text content rather than analyzing individual blocks can enhance students' intuitive understanding [12]. Almost intuitively and vaguely during this process, first-language grammar concepts are applied to the second language for reshaping. This understanding ability is not in a specific order but is an almost natural transition. This view coincides with Krashen's view of the order of language acquisition; that is, the recognition of the "caregiver language" learning method is more significant for teaching second language learners. Caregiver language is more similar to the first language acquisition because it is generated in the dialogue between caregivers and children in infancy [13].

Although Day and Bamford claim that instruction is more successful when it provides material below the student's present level (i-1) [14]. Therefore, based on these two relative viewpoints, Mohammad Hossein Keshmirshekan conducted a study on the impact of non-difficult inputs on the reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners [15]. Research results prove that this study demonstrated that more challenging materials could raise Iranian EFL learners' motivation for reading English, defying the widespread assumption that easier materials would do the same. One may argue that challenging materials have a discovery character, which piques students' curiosity and drives them to learn new topics. Furthermore, it's possible that pupils won't be as motivated to learn simple, everyday topics without rich content [15]. This proves that comprehensible input can provide learners with understandable language materials and also increase students' learning motivation. Hence, i+1 is very important for language learning. Zhang's experiment takes 80 students as the research object, sets up the experimental group and the control group for a training period, and tests the final learning results of the two groups of students in the form of questionnaires [16]. The experimental group provided supplementary English materials based on learning English courses in ordinary schools and reading understandable and interesting content based on Krashen's Input Theory. In contrast, the control group only learned English in class without additional materials [10]. After a semester of experiments, the results show that students with additional material input get higher scores. These findings demonstrate the value of Krashen's input theory in English instruction, particularly about the two concepts of comprehensibility and huge input.

4. Disadvantages of Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen's input hypothesis has limitations. According to Krashen, "ideal or optimal input" should possess the following four qualities: it should be understandable; it should be engaging and pertinent; non-grammatically sequenced programs are organized (not grammatically sequenced); and it should have enough of each [17]. The last need for Krashen's perfect input must be of a suitable amount. Krashen emphasized several times that the input should be adequate, but he did not clarify the benchmark for this quantity. The average learner requires over 720 hours of classroom time to study German, French, and Indian at a good level and roughly 1,950 hours to master some foreign languages, such as Arabic, Korean, and Chinese, according to a survey conducted by an Ameri-

can research institute, which Diller mentions in his book [17]. While these figures indicate the maximum amount that can be learned, the accurate definition of sufficient input time in China is challenging due to its difficult measurability. Most students have limited time available for learning [18].

Zhang's experiment just proves that Krashen's input theory is of great help to English teaching, especially in the two aspects of massive input and comprehensibility [16]. However, even based on Krashen's input theory, this experiment did not prove the practicality of the i+1 theory because the materials input by the students in the experimental group were highly consistent, and the experimenters did not select customized materials for the students according to their existing abilities.

Krashen's theory does not give a very detailed explanation of the i+1 theory. For example, how to evaluate the level of I, the amount of 1, and how to reflect it in the actual content are not explained [13]. Moreover, large-scale teaching activities are time-consuming and labor-consuming to evaluate the current level of students in a personalized way and develop a unique "i+1" teaching scheme for each student (including the selection of teaching materials, the setting of homework after class, and the diversified display of examination forms), which is not suitable for mass teaching. This is enough to show that the inadequacy of the "i+1" theoretical model and its over-idealized characteristics make it difficult to implement in modern foreign language courses.

It can only be used for learners with a foundation in the new language, and it is unsuitable for every learner. In this study, Krashen suggests that we should also try to have a base of words or letters for voluntary and recreational reading. For example, a Bengali speaker who wants to learn French must recognize French words. or letters [19]. When learners learn a language, they need the relevant language foundation, which Krashen called 'i'. After learning, if learners want to improve their language skills further, they must input something higher than their current language level. For instance, the present learner only possesses knowledge of the letters and words of the language.

MA Salam notes that he learns languages by starting with the alphabet, moving on to vocabulary, and finally focusing on the grammar and structure of the target language [20].

Below is an example from Salam [20]:

Salam watches Hindi films, which helps him or her grasp the language better. However, he cannot write or speak Hindi now due to a lack of Hindi alphabetic knowledge.

Consequently, learners must acquire a deeper understanding of the language to enhance their language skills. One

can gradually expand their vocabulary and grasp basic sentence structures called the '1' part. Learners require a solid language foundation to effectively utilize the Krashen input 'i+1' model.

Secondly, academics think that "input" is defined too narrowly. Krashen despises and shuns unnatural input forms, placing excessive weight on natural input forms of language learning in a natural language environment. Limiting oneself to this natural input mode will inevitably result in fewer input channels and insufficient input quantity for second language learners with insufficient innate conditions. This is precisely the outcome of the issue that Rosenberg's advocacy of "ample input" contradicts his own [19]. When students engage in natural input, they actively learn the materials; in contrast, non-natural input is a passive process. It seems obvious that the former is better for students learning a second language.

5. Suggestions

Teachers should select textbooks suitable for students' language level and combine them with real language materials so as to make the language input to students interesting, relevant, and challenging. Students should input high-quality language materials but also pay attention to controlling the amount of input and avoid inputting too difficult content. The amount of input should be moderate to ensure adequate exposure to the new language knowledge. Teachers can flexibly adjust teaching strategies according to students' language level and learning needs. Task-based teaching, cooperative learning, and other teaching methods can be adopted to improve the teaching effect.

6. Conclusion

This paper expounds on utilizing Krashen's input hypothesis in English language learning from auditory, oral, visual, and written communication perspectives. Based on this analysis, it can be inferred that across all these aspects, students ought to be instructed in language materials that exceed their current proficiency level to facilitate the acquisition process. This shows that Krashen's input theory, as an influential theory in the world's language circle, provides a theoretical foundation for modern English teaching and ideas for improving teaching methods. However, Krashen's Input Hypothesis also faces certain limitations. Firstly, it is challenging for individuals to determine the quantity of input. Secondly, due to individual differences, educators struggle to provide appropriate learning materials for each student. Furthermore, the Input Hypothesis appliesapplies only to learners with a certain level of language proficiency. In reality, not all individuals

possess such a foundation. Lastly, Krashen disdains unnatural input, yet learners acquire information predominantly through unconventional methods.

The constraint of this systematic review lies in the age of some sources, even though they still hold a certain degree of relevance, particularly highlighting the implementation of Krashen's input hypothesis in English education. The authors, once again, demonstrated the constructive impact of Krashen's input hypothesis in English teaching, following a sequence of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, thereby serving as a noteworthy exemplar.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed alphabetically.

References

[1]Krashen, S. (1994). The input hypothesis and its rivals. Implicit and explicit learning of languages. 45-77.

[2]Krashen, S. (1985). The input hypothesis: Issues and implications. New York: Longman.

[3]Krashen, S. D. (1999). Seeking a role for grammar: A review of some recent studies. Foreign Language Annals, 32, 245-254.

[4]Hui, R., He, Z., Hu, Y., & Yuan, Y. (2020). Applying Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" in translated English textbooks for junior middle schools and its suggestions: A case study of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation, 24,157-159.

[5]Li, C. (2013). The influence of Krashen's input hypothesis on teaching college English listening in China. Studies in Literature and Language, 6(3), 49.

[6]Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. The Modern Language Journal, 73(4), 440-464.

[7]Li, J. & Wang, Y. (2010). Application of Krashen Input Theory in English Reading Teaching. Crazy English (Teachers Edition), 3, 52-54+237.

[8]Huang, X. (2018). Input-theory-based English reading teaching strategies in senior high school. Master's Thesis, Qufu Normal University.

[9]Yu, M. (2018). Application of Krashen's language input theory to English writing teaching in rural middle schools. Master's Thesis, Harbin Normal University.

[10]Zheng, J. (2022). Revisiting Krashen's Input Theory in Second Language Acquisition. In 2022 2nd International Conference on Business Management, Humanities and Education Engineering, Clausius Scientific Press.

[11]Patrick, R. (2019). Comprehensible Input and Krashen's theory. Journal of Classics Teaching, 20(39), 37-44.

[12]Yang, J. (2001). A framework for exploring subconscious learning of a second language. Journal of Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications (Social Science), 3(1).

[13]Huang, Z. & Kong, L. (2023). Krashen Input Theory review and new solutions to theoretical models. Overseas English.

[14]Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). Extensive reading in the second language classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[15]Keshmirshekan, M. H. (2019). Krashen's Input Hypothesis, reading comprehension and reading motivation: i+ 1 versus i-1. Language in India, 19(5), 10-26.

[16]Zhang, P. (2018). Research applying Krashen's language input theory in primary school English reading teaching. Master's Thesis. Nanjing Normal University.

[17]Diller, K. (1978). The language teaching controversy. Massachusettes: Newbury House.

[18]Wei, D. (2005). An analysis of the limitations of Krashen's "Language input theory." Vocational Education Forum, 32, 60-61.

[19]Weng, Y. (2006). Comment on the "Input Hypothesis" of second language acquisition. Journal of Minzu University of China, 4, 142-144.

[20]Salam, M. A. (2020). A critical evaluation of Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis in second language learning and teaching. Jagannath University Journal of Arts, 10(2).