

The Influence of “i+1” on Chinese Foreign Language Teaching Methods

WANG Yan

Harbin Engineering University, Harbin, China

The “Monitor Model” explains the process and its situation from five different parts: the acquisition/learning, monitor, natural order, input, and affective filter. The Input Hypothesis, as one part of “Monitor Model” proposed by Stephen D. Krashen, suggests that the comprehensible input plays a key role in the language acquisition. Nowadays, the Input Hypothesis, with “i+1” as its core proposal, influences Chinese foreign language teaching from various aspects. But there are also many disputes. In this paper, the author intends to elaborate on its main contents, characteristics, influences on foreign language teaching, existing defects, and so on, aiming to achieve the goal of reviewing of this theory and its influence in China.

Keywords: “i+1”, Input Hypothesis, foreign language teaching methods

Introduction

The “Monitor Model” explains the process and its situation from five different parts: the acquisition/learning, monitor, natural order, input, and affective filter. In his book *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Krashen (1982) summed up his five major hypotheses. After restating the first three hypotheses, he made a detailed description and demonstration of the new “Input Hypothesis” and “Affective Filter Hypothesis” and the important position of the Input Hypothesis has been affirmed. He argued that the Input Hypothesis “may be the only most important concept in the theory of second language acquisition” (Krashen, 1982, p. 9), because it answers a key question in language learning, that is, how to acquire language, especially foreign language.

Through the theoretical analysis of Input Hypothesis, the research does a search on the CNKI under the keywords, “i+1” and “Foreign Language Teaching”, retrieves 11 intensive papers of 77 periodical papers (2010-2016), and thus summarizes and analyzes them to survey “i+1” theory’s influence on Chinese foreign language teaching methods and its limitations, in order to improve teaching methods and promote learners’ second language acquisition.

Input Hypothesis and “i+1”

The Theoretical Basis of “i+1”

The “i+1” is the essence of “language Input Hypothesis” put forward by Krashen in the theory of second language acquisition, which has been evaluated and studied by many scholars at home and abroad. Krashen argued that humans can only acquire language when they have access to comprehensible input. The Input Hypothesis attempts to explain how the learner acquires the second language. The Input Hypothesis is only concerned with “acquisition”, not “learning” (WANG, 2012, p. 264). According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses along the “natural order” when he/she receives second language “input” that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence.

The “i+1” is supported by the theory of first language acquisition, the “silence period” of language learning, and John B. Watson’s view on children’s psychology and the dialectical angle of the quantitative changes with important arguments (HE & XIAO, 2002, p. 238).

Krashen’s “i+1” is based on the first language acquisition, which is a language learning similar to that of children’s mother tongue acquisition. The “i+1” requires language learners to be exposed to the target language environment and achieve comprehensible input by listening and reading as main means. Similar to children’s acquisition of native language, a language learner can naturally learn the target language as long as the learner can obtain enough comprehensible input.

Krashen argued that fluent language (including mother tongue and second language) abilities cannot be obtained through “teaching” and that teachers are required to allow students not to speak at the initial stage of language learning, during which language learners form the initial “i” stage of language learning by listening to a large amount of the target language, processing, and reorganization. This “silent period” can be short, as few as a few hours or can be long as many as months. Moreover, the silent period can always run through language learning, and in “i+1”, the new knowledge intake stage, learners can accumulate the understanding of the new language knowledge “i+1” through the “silent period” and achieve the purpose of output.

Large amount of language input is the basic requirement of language learning. Without necessary input, language learning is of nonsense. To solve the problem of “quantity”, learners need to be frequently exposed to large amount of target language (TIAN & LI, 2016, p. 202). That is to say, quantitative causes a qualitative change.

The Main Content of “I+1” Input Hypothesis

The main content of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis is “i+1”. “i” means the existing level of learners and “i+1” means slightly higher than the current “i” level. The view is that the overall difficulty of language input cannot exceed the learner’s learning ability, but should be slightly higher than the language materials which are suitable for learner’s existing ability. Learners gradually achieve the qualitative change of language learning ability by the accumulation of continuously learning language knowledge (XU, 2016, p. 5).

Krashen argued that the ideal language input should be understandable, interesting, and relevant, non-grammatical programming, and sufficient input. The “i+1” theory contains the following aspects.

Firstly, “input” is the primary condition of language acquisition. There are three different views on “input”. Behavioral linguistics calls the external language input “stimulus” and the language output of the learner is called

“response” and the stimulus determines the response. Nativism holds that there is a language acquisition mechanism in the natural brain and the learner is a “huge initiator”. The language input is the same as the “trigger” that only activates the mechanism. “The learner’s contact with the language does not explain the acquisition of language. Interactive theory holds that language learning is the result of the interaction between the external language environment and the brain language acquisition mechanism” (Ellis, 2004, pp. 128-129). According to this view, the language acquisition mechanism of brain only works in the external language environment.

Secondly, the input language must be “comprehensible”. Krashen believed that language acquisition can only occur when learners are exposed to comprehensible language information. The understandable language input is a necessary condition for language acquisition and an incomprehensible language input is not only useless for learners, but also a noise.

Thirdly, comprehensible language must have “i+1” conditions. If a learner’s current competence is “i”, then comprehensible input is “i+1”, the next step in the developmental sequence. Input which is either too simple (i+1) or too complex (i+2/3/4...) will not be useful for acquisition. Krashen viewed the input hypothesis as central to his model of SLA (Second Language Acquisition).

Fourthly, Krashen argued that language input should follow the “here and now” principle. The input language must be real and meaningful, because language acquisition can be only achieved in the real context and only the real language exchange is meaningful, the learner will not pay too much attention to the language form; in order to exclude mother tongue interference, learning will be relaxed and happy (WANG, 2008, p. 84).

The Influences of Input Hypothesis on Chinese Foreign Language Teaching Methods

The Direct Influences

The “i+1” language Input Hypothesis has a direct impact on foreign language teaching in China. Chinese teachers begin to strengthen comprehensible input and multi-modal teaching stimulation and use multimedia technology in oral English and listening teaching activities.

Using multimedia technology. First of all, multimedia teaching effectively stimulates the students’ interest in learning English and provides students with a natural and real language environment, so that students in the second language environment can effectively improve their English skills. This is because the multimedia technology has animation, text, video playback, and other functions, making the students in the second language environment master English language knowledge in the subconscious way. In addition, teachers use multimedia technology to create English language environment, so as to make students get comprehensible input. It can also stimulate students’ interest in speaking English in the real English language environment and then make students learn English actively and thus improve students’ English.

Multimedia technology can guide students to correct pronunciation and adjust the tone. Because students in our country lack the English language environment, the students are often influenced by the non-standard pronunciation and non-standard intonation in the oral English and listening training activities. Therefore, the teachers use the multimedia technology to help the students correct the pronunciation and the tone, so that students get the correct input. In the actual English communication activities, they can have a natural expression and narrative and thus it improves the students’ comprehensive English ability.

Strengthening comprehensible input. In addition, the influence of Krashen “i+1” Input Hypothesis on Chinese foreign language teaching is also reflected in that teachers ask the students to memorize the article to train the students’ oral English skills (DAI & DING, 2010, p. 48).

First, the recitation of the article can increase the comprehensible input, in order that students can remember the English vocabulary and phrases effectively (DONG & FU, 2003, p. 57; DING & WEI, 2005, p. 50; DING, 2007). Students need to use rich vocabulary and phrases in oral English, so teachers enable students to perform well in oral training by guiding students to memorize English chapters. By this way, students can master English vocabulary and phrases. And it can also deepen the students’ memory of this English knowledge, so as to improve the students’ oral English.

Second, reciting English articles is conducive to the formation of language sense. When students recite the article, they can master English skills in the subconscious way. Thus, it improves the students’ oral English communication skills effectively.

Strengthening multi-modal teaching stimulation. The influence of Krashen “i+1” Input Hypothesis on Chinese foreign language teaching is also reflected in that teachers use visual and auditory stimulation in teaching activities.

At present, there are two ways to stimulate students to learn English through sensory stimulation. They are visual and auditory stimuli. Previously, many teachers in China pay attention to reading comprehension teaching, ignoring the English listening comprehension teaching and oral expression teaching for a long time. As a result, most students learn to memorize more words by rote. When they are reading, they recognize them easily, but when they are listening and speaking, they find it difficult to understand them and even express them.

There are many factors that affect listening comprehension and oral expression, one of which is a specific word, meaning whether the brain has stored its visual or auditory symbols; another is, if the visual and auditory symbols do not exist, whether to search for other symbols in a short time with the fastest speed and the shortest time to complete the process of understanding the completion of expression. After learning about Krashen’s “i+1” theory, many teachers realized that one of the main purposes of listening and speaking training was to quickly storage visual and auditory vocabulary in the student’s mind and make the vocabularies become their familiar symbols to ensure that they can quickly complete the course of language information decoding. So the visual and auditory stimulation allows students to have access to language input better and getting the language input through the visual and auditory stimuli is very helpful for students to get more vocabulary and is very helpful for teachers to improve teaching quality (MA & WEI, 2015, p. 27).

The Indirect Influences

Indirectly affecting grammar teaching. The “i+1” theory indirectly affects how to learn grammar naturally, such as meaningful teaching and interaction in the classroom. In other words, grammatical competence can develop a linguistic form in a smooth, unconscious, and focused environment. According to Krashen, teaching methods belong to purposeful learning. As a learner, purposeful learning leads to learning only basic knowledge blindly. It cannot lead to the acquisition directly. It is only in the subconscious way that can the learner really gain the ability. A language mean of learning English knowledge, among other things, is grammar. Grammar teaching may be intuitive (because it is also in our native language) and it does not necessarily need to

learn or teach formal grammatical rules. In China, English is a foreign language. Learners have no language environment, so they need to master grammar to achieve one part of comprehensible input.

Indirectly affecting English ability improving. Oral expression and listening comprehension are two of the most important aspects of enhancing students' English. English grammar ability is actually part of the English language communication ability. The necessary condition for learning English knowledge is no doubt to learn more grammar rules, whether simple or complex. Teachers need to know more important vocabulary and grammar to improve the students' listening and reading ability. Therefore, in China, students learn English in such indirect ways as through the practice of language input theory and improve oral and listening ability through grammar.

In this way, students can obtain a large number of useful English words and communication language, which is the purpose of grammar teaching. With the help of vocabulary and the grammar rules they master, students can improve their oral and listening skills more quickly. In the actual listening comprehension, in addition to the background, knowledge grammar also plays an important role (BAI, 2015, p. 14). The knowledge of sentence structure in English learning is a very important part of the learner's comprehensible input process. Try to understand the rules of hearing materials and unfamiliar sentence structures and try to recall randomly arranged words. This is the basis for the knowledge of sentence structure in listening comprehension and oral expression. Learners often encounter some sentence structures.

In summary, Krashen's view indirectly affects the foreign language teaching methods in China, which contributes to the progress of Chinese English teaching reform, such as emphasizing the integrity of sentence structure. These structures are subtle and less obvious. It is sometimes difficult to grasp the accuracy of the sentence structure and its meaning is not clear (MA & WEI, 2015, p. 27).

Limitation of the “i+1” Theory

Although the “i+1” theory has great influence on Chinese foreign language teaching methods, the hypothesis also has some limitations.

Firstly, the main contents of the “i+1” theory include “i” and “+1”, but both are uncertain variables. “i” refers to the original level of language learners. However, due to the language learners receive different education before they learn the target language, their “i” level varies. In the Input Hypothesis, Krashen assumed the “i” level for the same level and carried out “+1” based on the same level. Moreover, “+1” refers to language materials that are slightly higher than the original level of language learners. But “slightly higher” is not a measurement standard, because the language learners have different comprehensible ability. It will inevitably be “not enough” and “too much” situation.

Secondly, the “i+1” theory is from the first language (mother tongue) research field. The view that the first language acquisition is directly equivalent to the second language acquisition will inevitably lead to controversy. In the process of language acquisition, the first language learners not only acquire the language, but also form their own outlook on world, life, and values. These three outlooks will inevitably affect the second language acquisition, that is, language transfer. The language transfer is divided into positive and negative transfer, both positive and negative, which can affect language learning.

Thirdly, the “i+1” Input Hypothesis exaggerates the role of language acquisition, eliminating learning from the language process and opposing the “acquisition” and “learning” in a blunt way. Strong language atmosphere of first language acquisition makes language learners (children) not need specialized “learning” to master language skills to output language, but the second language acquisition is rarely in this language atmosphere.

The non-programming of “i+1” leads to the randomness of the acquired content and has an impact on the accuracy and speed of language learning (ZHOU, 2003, p. 84).

Conclusion

Krashen’s “i+1” theory provides a lot of reference and guidance for foreign language learning and teaching in our country, especially the comprehensible input, because the ultimate goal of language learning is communication, so that the meaning of the speaker can be accurately communicated to each other.

Teachers should create a natural and relaxed learning environment for language learners, so that they are more willing to learn foreign languages emotionally, so as to improve their learning efficiency.

However, the language Input Hypothesis still has some limitations. Teachers should combine the specific context, recognize these deficiencies, and then complete these theories constantly through efforts.

Finally, there are some limitations of this research. Firstly, the research just surveys papers from CNKI. It cannot confirm whether authors of the papers did what they wrote. Secondly, with the development of science and technology, we wonder whether multimedia teaching is influenced by Input Hypothesis.

References

- BAI, L. R. (2015). A study of the potential relationship between second language grammatical competence and listening comprehension ability. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 47(6), 14.
- DAI, Z. Q., & DING, Y. R. (2010). The role of reciting texts in Chinese students’ English learning. *Foreign Languages Research*, 120(2), 46-52.
- DING, Y. R. (2007). Text memorization and imitation: The practices of successful Chinese learners of English. *System*, 35, 271-280.
- DING, Y. R., & WEI, Y. (2005). Use of formulaic language as a predictor of L2 oral and written performance. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 28(5), 49-53.
- DONG, W., & FU, L. X. (2003). The role of recitation language input in college English teaching. *Foreign Language World*, 96(4), 56-59.
- Ellis, R. (2004). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- HE, T., & XIAO, L. Q. (2002). The philosophy thoughts of Confucius’s “gain new knowledge by reviewing old” and Krashen “i+1” in foreign language teaching. *Journal of Southwest Institute for Ethnic Groups*, 23(10), 238.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- MA, Y. H., & WEI, R. J. (2015). The application of input hypothesis and output hypothesis in college English teaching. *Jiaoshuyuren*, 9, 90-91.
- TIAN, D. X., & LI, Y. (2016). Krashen’s input hypothesis and its pedagogical implications on second language teaching. *Overseas English*, 4, 202.
- WANG, D. H. (2012). The analysis of Krashen’s input hypothesis. *Overseas English*, 3, 264-265.
- WANG, L. Q. (2008). On Krashen’s “i+1” language input hypothesis and EFL teaching and learning in China. *Journal of Weinan Teachers University*, 23(3), 84.
- XU, Y. (2016). The analysis of Krashen’s “i+1”. *Jilin Education*, 15, 5.
- ZHOU, H. Y. (2003). Cognitive analysis of Krashen’s input hypothesis. *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, 14(2), 84.