

The Input Hypothesis and its Implications for High School English Listening Teaching

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Abstract

Listening, as one of the four language skills, is an important part of English teaching and learning in senior high schools. Moreover, with the development of teaching and the improvement of the National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2017), more and more students desire to improve their listening abilities. But for most students, their listening performance is still on a poor level due to the traditional teaching method. Therefore, how to improve high school students' listening proficiency is a key issue that should put highly emphasis on it . And it has long been widely acknowledged that language input is essential to foreign language learning. Among the common views, the "Input Hypothesis" theory proposed by Krashen has a profound impact on the study of second language acquisition in China. Therefore, this paper explores the implication of Krashen's input hypothesis in English listening teaching, which mainly contains strategies related to the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening input, in order to shed light on high school English listening teaching..

Keywords

Krashen's input hypothesis; Listening teaching.

1. Introduction to Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen's SLA theory consisted five hypotheses, which are the "acquisition-learning hypothesis", the "natural order hypothesis", the "monitor hypothesis", the "filter hypothesis", and the "input hypothesis". And the "input hypothesis" is the core of Krashen's SLA theory. Krashen suggests that people who learn and use second language have two completely different processes, the first one is called "acquisition", the second one is called "learning". Acquisition occurs subconsciously as a result of participating in natural communication where the focus is on meaning. Learning occurs as a result of conscious study of the formal properties of the language. In performance, "acquired" knowledge serves as the major source for initiating both the comprehension and production of utterances. Based on the distinction of learning and acquisition, input theory tries to explain how we get language and how to improve ourselves in the acquisition. Krashen's SLA theory consisted five hypotheses, which are the "acquisition-learning hypothesis", the "natural order hypothesis", the "monitor hypothesis", the "filter hypothesis", and the "input hypothesis". And the "input hypothesis" is the core of Krashen's SLA theory. Krashen suggests that people who learn and use second language have two completely different processes, the first one is called "acquisition", the second one is called "learning". Acquisition occurs subconsciously as a result of participating in natural communication where the focus is on meaning. Learning occurs as a result of conscious study of the formal properties of the language. In performance, "acquired" knowledge serves as the major source for initiating both the comprehension and production of utterances. Based on the distinction of learning and acquisition, input theory tries to explain how we get language and how to improve ourselves in the acquisition.

1.1. Definition

In the late 1970s, the American linguist Krashen proposed a model of second language acquisition, which is known as the monitoring model. This theory has exerted a wide and deep influence on language learning. Soon after, many experts and scholars in China began to introduce the input hypothesis, which has a wide and profound impact on foreign language teaching in China. According to Krashen, people are born with two language systems that can be used as soon as they are activated. Of these two systems, one is conscious and the other is subconscious. The subconscious system is called the monitoring system. That's to say, the brain activates both systems when people communicate in daily life. The nature of the monitoring system is conscious grammar, which has the function of editing and controlling. Krashen's monitoring model consists of five hypotheses, the most important one is the input hypothesis, which explicitly tells us how language is acquired. That means people acquire language by first hearing linguistic information and then processing and analyzing it through two systems in the brain. For language learners, there are three steps to language acquisition. First, they hear simple language information. Second, the information is understood through context and real-life situations. Third, the language is acquired naturally through communication. According to the input hypothesis, language can only be acquired implicitly if the meaning is understood.

1.2. Features

Krashen argues that for language learners, especially foreign language learners, the regular, unchallenging language input does not improve learners' ability to use the language. In his view, the only way to learn a language is by understanding the input materials or accepting "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) To improve language proficiency, foreign language learners must receive a large amount of comprehensible language input, and foreign language learners must understand what the language is trying to say. That is to say, foreign language learners must focus on the meaning of the discourse rather than its grammatical structure. But it does not mean that foreign language learners should give up acquiring the grammatical structure of the language when acquiring it; Krashen believes that language learners will naturally acquire the grammatical structure in the process of language acquisition. In addition, language input must be infinitely close to comprehensible input, i.e., it must be chosen at a level that is both appropriate and slightly above the learner's level, and the learner must focus on the meaning of the language rather than on learning the structure and form of the language. Krashen states that the ideal language input should have the following characteristics:

1.2.1. Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility means that the input material should be "comprehensible" in the process of learning a foreign language. Therefore, Krashen proposed the "i+1" structure. The "i" refers to the learner's current language level and the "1" refers to the level of difficulty that is slightly above the learner's level. The "1" in this case also refers to new language knowledge. This also explains why it is impossible to acquire a foreign language by listening to the radio, unless the language is very similar to the target language. According to Krashen, in order to acquire a language and improve their language skills, foreign language learners must learn language input materials that are slightly above their level, otherwise, they will be stuck in place.

1.2.2. Interest and Relevance

Interest and relevance mean that the input material itself should be interesting and closely related to the language learners' daily life. Krashen believes that inner emotion is an important factor affecting language acquisition, which is mainly because of the role of emotion filtering. It is only accessible when the learner's affective filter is not blocking access to it. And it has proved that the greater the affective filter, the more effective of the learners' learning. If the input material is interesting and related to the system, the learners may even ignore that the material

is presented in a foreign language. Therefore, more interesting and realistic input materials are more likely to stimulate learners' interest in learning and weaken learners' internal emotional barriers, so the effectiveness of language input can be greatly improved.

1.2.3. Non-grammar Arrangement

Non-grammatical arrangement refers to the fact that language learning materials do not have to be arranged in terms of grammatical procedures. Krashen proposed that if the input is comprehensible, then in most cases, the "i+1" model is automatically rendered. That is to say, don't try to pursue the "i+1" input content. In teaching, we should focus on a language structure and each unit, then the whole class in the development of the "i+1" level will be the same. We assume that the material is non syntactic program in the nature of the input which contains multiple structural changes, if the input is comprehensible, then everyone will have their own "i+1" model of development. In addition, comprehensible input actually could help review and recall. So, if our input is not a grammatical program, it can be added and consolidated after the material input. Furthermore, the curriculum that based on grammar will reduce the quality of comprehensible input, and distort the focus of communication. Teachers will pay more attention to the way that the learners express rather than content of expression.

1.2.4. Adequate Input

Adequate input means that the language teacher should provide the learners with sufficient input materials in the process of acquiring a foreign language. If there is too little input, the language ability of foreign language learning will be slowed down. Too much language input will overwhelm learners and increase their psychological burden. Therefore, in the process of language acquisition, it is important to grasp the amount of "1" so that learners can gradually transform the "1" into their own "i". Regarding the importance of sufficient input, some scholars point out that children can be taught their native language at any time and in any place in their family and social environment without any intentional teaching. This allows them to be taught their native language in a sufficiently natural way, which significantly reducing the difficulty of acquiring it.

Therefore, in order to ensure the effectiveness of language input, in addition to strengthening the instruction of language learning strategies, foreign language teachers should provide students with sufficient and interesting input materials and create a good language learning environment for students. In addition, teachers should strictly follow the "i+1" principle to ensure the comprehensibility of language input.

2. Current problems in teaching English listening in senior high schools

Through reading the literature and combining with the author's internship experience, the following issues are found in current high school English listening teaching:

2.1. Emphasis on test-oriented training in listening teaching

Due to the long-term influence of traditional test-oriented education, high school English teachers pay more attention to training students' test-taking ability in order to enable them to get higher scores. In listening classes, teachers usually just play the listening materials to students and let them answer the questions. After answering the questions, they announce the correct answers for students to check. For questions answered incorrectly, the listening materials may be played again, or the listening scripts may be announced for students to find the answers. relatively monotonous and rigid, leading to less interaction between teachers and students and among students in the classroom.

2.2. Outdated and homogeneous content

Most of the listening content is mainly based on the textbook, with little supplementary material outside the textbook. Although the textbooks may be structured in a progressive manner in terms of listening skills training, they are also systematic and scientific. However, some listening materials are obviously outdated and disconnected from real language communication context, lacking relevance to the constantly changing social life and culture. As a result, it is difficult to create natural language learning situations, resulting in students losing interest in listening learning. The enthusiasm and initiative of students in learning listening are weakened, and their role as active learners is not effectively played.

2.3. Developing listening skills in isolation, ignoring the role of speaking

Many students have misunderstandings about listening learning, thinking that is just about listening to materials, answering questions, and checking the answers. Some students even think that teaching related cultural background knowledge or discussing relevant themes related to listening materials is unnecessary, failing to recognize the important role of cultural background in improving the comprehensibility of listening materials. After completing the listening material, many students simply sought to get the answers correct without thinking about output and applying the expressions in the listening material in a communicative context.

3. Implications of the input hypothesis for English listening teaching

3.1. Selecting appropriate and varied listening materials

According to Krashen, language learners not only need to receive a large amount of language input, but also have to internalise the language they receive through their own language acquisition devices. Therefore, the level of interest and authenticity of input language will allow language learners to subconsciously acquire the language. It is significant to choose listening materials that are appropriate to the characteristics of the students. Language teachers should keep up with the times, make full use of modern internet technology and select listening materials that are close to students' lives and have meaningful topics. Additionally, listening materials with strong interest can to some extent reduce students' anxiety and the influence of affective filters.

One of the most important characteristics of Krashen's input hypothesis is the requirement for an adequate amount of language input. As the initial channel of language input, listening should not be limited to question training alone. Listening training is a continuous process. A large and diverse range of listening materials is the basic prerequisite for language learners to acquire the language. In addition to textbooks, diversified listening materials such as English movies, songs, TV programs, etc., can also be used as listening training materials to reduce students' anxiety in certain learning contexts, thereby reducing the blockage caused by affective filters and improving learning efficiency.

3.2. Reforming listening teaching methods to create an accessible classroom

The traditional mode of listening teaching has followed the pattern of "teacher plays the sound - students do exercises - answer", until the end of the 1970s when Krashen's second language acquisition theory was introduced into China. It was only in the late 1970s that Krashen's theory of second language acquisition was introduced to China, and many scholars began to explore the teaching methods of the listening, with the emergence of the communicative and task-based teaching methods, both of which have made significant progress. However, recent research in listening pedagogy has focused on listening as a means of learning rather than as a means of language processing. Therefore, in classroom language teaching, teacher need to be in the best emotional state before each lesson, using his or her high emotions to guide and

influence the students and reduce their emotional filter. Over the years, it has been proven in listening classrooms that a relaxed classroom atmosphere and diverse teaching methods can allow students to practice listening without realising it and achieve the best possible teaching results.

3.3. Combining listening with other skills

In the process of communication, listening, reading and writing activities are complementary to each other, so listening lessons should not be limited to pure listening. Teachers should combine listening training with the cultivation of other language skills to promote each other. For example, dictation can train the ability to remember while listening; through the explanation of vocabulary and grammar, students can improve their understanding of complex sentences; through retelling, students can enhance their understanding of listening materials and improve their oral expression; through writing outlines, students can improve their written expression. The improvement of these skills in turn helps to improve students' listening skills, creating a virtuous cycle. In order to enable students to understand and comprehend listening materials, teachers should teach difficult grammar and cultural background knowledge related to the listening materials. For high school students, it is important to learn about the cultures of other countries to facilitate understanding of the listening material. Teachers can also enhance students' understanding of listening material by asking them to repeat what they have heard or to write summaries or overviews of what they have heard.

4. Strategies for teaching English listening based on the input hypothesis

4.1. Pre-listening: make thorough preparations

Before the lesson, the teacher should select appropriate materials to reach the level of "i+1." This can be done by conducting a test or survey to find out the current listening level of the students and then carefully reading the textbook and other listening materials to select materials that are interesting, coherent and easy to understand. It is advisable to choose authentic material from native English-speaking countries, taking into account the difficulty of listening materials in terms of speed, pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse. The listening material should be as comprehensible as possible, but also including some new words and unfamiliar phonetic phenomena or cultural knowledge. This makes the listening material at an 'i+1' level of difficulty and increases its relevance and interest, thus increasing students' interest in learning and stimulating their initiative.

Therefore, before the listening exercises, the teacher first leads the students to learn about the relevant cultural background, guides them in thinking and discussing the topic of the material, and gives them tips on the speed and accent of the speaker in the material, explaining and analysing long and complex sentences and difficult words. This increases the comprehensibility of the language material, promotes effective listening input and prepares students for the upcoming listening activities.

4.2. While-listening: focus on process

According to Krashen, language acquisition occurs automatically when learners engage in meaningful communication, so that oral activities such as question and answer, discussion and repetition in the classroom help to develop listening comprehension. At the same time, the integration of speaking, listening, speaking and practising (including exercises and note-taking) in the classroom also helps to enhance comprehensible input. In order to improve comprehensibility, we should use more intensive listening, which Rixon (1985) believes is more commonly used in the classroom. Although it is relatively slow, it helps to strengthen students' listening base and enhance their understanding of the material. It requires students to accurately grasp the important information in the listening material and to note down the

details. This means of comprehensible input not only develops good listening habits and skills, but also helps learners to improve their phonetics, improve their memory and thus improve their language competence.

4.3. Post-listening: combine output with input

Different from “language input” advocated by Krashen, Swain (1993) believes that comprehensible output is also a key link in second language acquisition, and learners’ language proficiency cannot be improved without a great deal of language output. Output refers to the target language that the learner produces, for instance, when the learner replies to a question formulated by the instructor in the target language. Some researchers have also confirmed the positive role of language output in teaching practice. Second language acquisition requires sufficient comprehensible input and sufficient comprehensible output which can verify the accuracy of input comprehension.

Considering the limited class hours of English listening courses, post-listening input mainly focuses on extensive listening, which only requires students to grasp the general meaning of the materials. The difficulty of listening materials should not be lower than the “i+1” level, and the content and form can be more diversified and interesting. e.g. listening to English programs from different radio stations, including news, feature reports, interviews, speeches, poetry, prose, movies, songs, etc. Students can choose listening materials based on their interests and engage in listening input in a more relaxed environment, which reduces students’ anxiety, allowing learners to naturally accept the language materials in a linguistic environment and effectively cultivate students’ English language thought, thereby improving listening learning efficiency. What’s more, it is also important to purposefully expand extracurricular reading and engage in various forms of English speaking activities, such as English movie dubbing, English singing competitions, drama performances, etc., which can increase the relevance and comprehensibility of listening input materials.

The comprehensible input hypothesis is an important guideline for English listening teaching, as long as listening teachers adhere to the principle of comprehensible input in their preparation, classroom teaching and after-school activities, students’ listening can be improved to a great extent through training and the input of a large amount of comprehensible material, which also naturally enhances students’ ability to acquire English. At the same time, students’ English language acquisition abilities will naturally enhance.

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