Input Hypothesis and SLA in China

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Abstract. With the deepening of globalization, English has almost become a common tongue across the world, so it is advisable for us Chinese to further promote it in order to carve out a place in the international arena. With a view to achieving it, a great many statistics have been gleaned and analyzed, and then presented with the guidance of Input Hypothesis; hopefully, SLA in China will be more scientific and prosperous in China.

Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon and can be used as a tool of communication. With the rapid development of international exchange, English is becoming more and more important. In China, foreign language teaching has a history of more than 140 years, but the result has invariably not been satisfactory, how to improve the acquisition of English becomes quite urgent. In order to improve the efficiency of English teaching, researchers and language educators have introduced the theories of SLA from abroad. Among them, Krashen’s Monitor Theory, especially the Input Hypothesis, has been the most widely acclaimed.

Stephen D. Krashen proposed the famous Monitor Theory \cite{1} which argues that comprehensible input hypothesis illustrates the relationship between language acquisition and language learning, and Krashen calls it the central claim of Monitor Theory.

In order to make sure of acquiring language efficiently, the hypothesis points out that the language accepted by learners must meet the following four conditions. Firstly, there must be enough input in sure that learners will automatically get the necessary grammar and structure of a language. Secondly, the input must be interesting, closely related, that is to say the language materials prepared to input should be fun to arouse the initiation and enthusiasm of learners. The third one is comprehensible input that the learners can understand the material they heard. The difficulty of the materials should be slightly higher than the learners’ language levels at present, namely “i + 1” (“i” represents the knowledge the learners have mastered, “+ 1” is the knowledge slightly higher than the level “I”) \cite{2}. In other words, the biggest responsibility of language teachers is to let the students accept as much as comprehensible language input.

Status Quo of the Input of English Teaching in China

At present, with regard to English teaching in China, there exists a prevailing phenomenon that teachers usually adopt traditional methods of teaching for a variety of reasons, and doing so to some extent hinders the promotion of English teaching and the effective acquisition of students.

Insufficient Input in Class. Input Hypothesis stresses that the application of the structure of a new language requires reading widely and constantly, and class is the main input place for students, if the school can’t provide enough classes, the quantity of input can’t be ensured. \cite{3} However, the English teaching in class in China is not sufficient.

Firstly, the teaching schedule on English course in Chinese schools is insufficient and irrational. The most obvious stage of fewer hours of class arrangements is in primary schools. Let’s refer to a curriculum for a class in a public elementary school in the fourth grade.
Table 1. Curriculum Schedule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Moral Education</td>
<td>Comprehensive course</td>
<td>Moral Education</td>
<td>Comprehensive course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Class Meeting</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table 1 shows that the fourth grade students from the public elementary school have three English lessons in one week, which is only half of the settings of Chinese and mathematics classes per week, but more compared to music and art classes. So English lesson is in an awkward position, which is obviously in an inferior position.

Secondly, there are deficiencies in English Teaching Content. According to a survey, although we have been advocating quality education for a long time, schools still determine how to teach based on how to test. For schools’ honor or individual performance, some English teachers simply arrange teaching content for tests. They only teach what will be examined and skip what won’t be tested. As a consequence, the quantity of input is not complete. Students may miss the opportunity to acquire some useful knowledge because the teacher leaves them out for they are not the examination points.

**Low-Quality Input.** According to Input Hypothesis, good quality of the input is the most significant premise in language acquisition. However, the present quality of English input in China’s English teaching is still poor, which can be specifically exhibited in the teacher’s input and text input.

In terms of the teacher’s input, Firstly, some teachers hope their students can acquire more knowledge than others, so they ignore the students’ current level “i” involved in the Input Hypothesis of Krashen, and begin to seek “high and difficult standard” of the training of “i + 2”, “i + 3”. For instance, when pupils haven’t understood the meaning of the article, the teacher requests them to recite it. Apparently the input is beyond the students’ current level. Secondly, a lot of teachers, even in primary schools, stress full English teaching in class which may cause incomprehension. For those students who have learned English just for a short time, full English teaching is not helpful for them. Thirdly, some teaching methods used by teachers are too boring. They sometimes ignore the interest, interactivity and participation of students, which will also contribute to poor quality of input.

In terms of the text input, the selection of English textbooks is not appropriate. As for teaching content, English teachers in different schools almost use the same textbooks. Each textbook more or less has its own limitations. The researchers found that in some areas, both the city and countryside use the same edition of textbook. However, students in city and the students in countryside have different foundation. The same textbooks may be hard for rural students, but too easy for city students. Moreover, textbooks lack cultural elements. Cultural awareness makes students use language to communicate with each other. For students, the input of culture of English-speaking countries is not only very helpful to their understanding and use of English, but also very beneficial to deepen their reorganization of the local culture and train their global awareness. So screening and refining of cultural information involved in various English textbooks should be treated carefully.

**Employment of Input Hypothesis in English Teaching**

In the above section, we analyzed the problems with English teaching in China from the
perspectives of the quantity and quality input. And in this section, the author is going to employ the Input Hypothesis theory to guide the English teaching, mainly from the angle of poor quality of the input, which is the decisive factor of language acquisition.

**Reasonable Selection and Application of Teaching Materials.** According to the Input Hypothesis, the input of a language must be comprehensible, interesting as well as relevant. To have a good comprehension of the input, the materials they give to students should raise students’ interest and be relevant to their daily life. The following are some suggested methods:

Firstly, provide interesting materials. The more interesting and associated the language materials are, the more the learners will learn from the process of acquisition. [4] It is suggested that we should create interesting conditions for students. Students who range from 6 years old to 15 years old like playing and they don’t like materials which are too traditional and academic. If the teacher chooses materials that students are not interested in, they could hardly concentrate on what the teacher says and comprehend the materials deeply. So education workers and researchers should be careful and cautious when they begin to choose the teaching materials, thinking more of students’ interest. [5]

Secondly, provide cultural connotation-oriented teaching materials. At recess in the classroom on campus, it is common to hear a lot of students complaining that the English class is too boring. One reason is that teachers are too strict with teaching language itself, rather than with cultural input. Actually, language is an important carrier and an indispensable part of culture. It is important to note that there is no language without specific cultural background. Thus learning a certain kind of language should not just learn the language itself, but also the culture of the target language, so when teaching, teachers should impart more cultural information to students.

Thirdly, make situation-based teaching plans. Teachers should arrange lessons according to practical teaching rather than the order of textbooks. In addition, English teachers should pay more attention to the present language structure obtained by students in a particular class, which is beneficial to the appropriate evaluation on the degree of difficulty of the selection of teaching materials. Only by making situation-based teaching plans can English teachers properly add or subtract parts of their teaching designation.

Fourthly, add life-related teaching content. We can also learn more from our lives because teaching materials aren’t confined to textbooks. Due to various reasons, the students don’t have enough chances to use English, so in daily life, chances should be created to them to practice their English. For instance, teaching needs parents’ cooperation and participation, so teachers can ask students to have communication with parents. After school, parents speak Chinese, and let the students read or write English, which provides the possibility of a different form of the input from textbook materials. When students hear parents reading Chinese, they will receive a boost in the number of English input. Besides this, English corners, English clubs can also be established to help students enhance their English.

**Implementing Comprehensible Input.** Krashen states that people acquire languages only if when they obtain comprehensible input. In other words, CI is necessary and sufficient for SLA. Krashen recognizes this when he asserts “comprehensible input is the essential ingredient for SLA, all other factors thought to encourage or cause SLA to work only when they contribute to comprehensible input” [6]. How to effectively implement comprehensible input of English usually involve the following two ways.

Firstly, Elevate English Teachers’ Professional Capability. It is easy to understand that the more professional teachers are, the more comprehensible the input would be. A responsible and effective English teacher must first fully understand the level of all the students and the individuals through the interaction in the process of teaching [7], and then makes a holistic plan for the whole class, to go along with which, different teaching plans, teaching materials and teaching goals should be designed. What’s more, teachers are supposed to provide students with opportunities of developing their thinking.

With the development of science and technology, we are now living in an era of information explosion. All the information is updated and spreads very quickly. If teachers don’t catch up, there
may be in embarrassment when students know about the news while teachers don’t. How to avoid this situation? The answer is “It is never too old to learn”. To improve themselves, firstly, they should enhance self-confidence to make students have the resonance with them. Secondly, they should improve the level of listening and supplement cultural background knowledge by reading English countries’ documentaries or watching movies and exercising as much as possible to find opportunities to improve oral English ability.

Secondly, Upgrade Teaching Methods. Only when you choose the right method can you reach the goal accurately and quickly. Ellis uses input to refer to the language that is addressed to the second language learner either by a native speaker or by another second language learner. If second language acquisition is to take place, the learner needs to have access to the input in the target language. Teachers should use different methods to create a natural and harmonious input environment. There are a lot of ways available for educators to choose from.

For example, teachers are supposed to observe the class closely and react accordingly. Teachers may have found that environment matters much in teaching. If students are in a good mood, they will think more actively and receive information faster. When the students are praised after answering questions, they will be very excited, and they will stare at the teacher the whole class, listen to the teacher carefully and participate in teaching activities actively. Therefore, when a student is answering a question, the teacher must show his trust and encouragement by eye contact; when a student couldn’t answer the question, the teacher should inspire and enlighten him with patience, and lets the student himself find the answer all by himself.

Apart from the above-mentioned methods, teacher can as well resort to other techniques. For example, teachers can teach students how to sing songs, how to dub, how to appreciate a movie, etc. One point should be noted that there is no short-cut to promote students’ English level, and what English learners should do is to put your whole heart to it.

Summary

From the preceding sections we can see that there are a lot of problems in current English teaching in our country from the perspective of quantity and quality. Although teachers and education researchers have tried a great many ways and made lots of efforts, they failed, so in this research, Krashen’s Input Hypothesis is mainly employed to improve the deficiencies about quantity, especially the quality. If this hypothesis carried out fully, SLA in our country will be elevated.

References