

Revisiting Krashen's Input Theory in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition has a profound impact on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) teaching and learning. However, it has a huge debate on his input theory and affective filter hypothesis. By reviewing recent researchers' works, the author finds that to complete or testify the "i+1" hypothesis, some aspects should be considered. This paper generalizes the five hypotheses of Krashen's SLA theory and reviews Krashen's input theory of "i+1", trying to provide new arguments for its application in SLA. This paper will analyze Krashen's hypothesis more deeply and try to offer new thoughts for "i+1" of input theory, including (1)the "i+1" time management factors in SLA; (2)match the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with the input theory, (3) the ideal resources of "i+1" given by caretakers to acquirers. To figure out what factors would affect "i+1" has practical guiding significance for improving the quality of SLA teaching and enable acquirers to explore foreign language learning more deeply.

1. Introduction

Stephen D. Krashen is a widely known language expert, educator, and professor in the field of linguistic and Second Language Acquisitions (SLA). Since 1980, his research works and ideas on SLA have thrived all over the world. Krashen makes a huge contribution to second language acquisition research. His input theory and affective theory were once accused by the other researchers since the extremist aspects contained in Krashen hypothesis [1, 2]. The idea of "Comprehensible Input" has attracted many SLA researchers. The factors that affect the "i+1" will be deeply discussed and an oversee variable in the hypothesis will be analyzed. The following paper can give an overview of the Krashen's hypothesis in SLA and the classic theory proposed by other researchers. Not only the language learner or the mentor in SLA can view the paper to construct further research, but also the acquirer can learn the theory on their own.

2. General Information about Krashen's Theory

Krashen's five hypotheses on SLA had enlightened many researchers in the field of SLA. He proposed the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, which makes distinction between "acquisition" and "learning" [3]. He defines "learning" as a conscious process and "acquisitions" as a subconscious process that learners acquiring their first language (L1). When learners initiate the acquisition process, they may not focus on what language rules have acquired before but have some "feeling" of right or wrong judgments. The adult learner can obtain the second language (L2) through the process of obtaining L1 called nature learning;

The Monitor hypothesis, which refers to self-correction or awareness of language out. The unnatural learning, conscious knowledge of language rules, function as Monitor to help acquirer to correct mistakes through the communication. The monitor hypothesis requires enough time for self-awareness to use language rules to set self-correction. During oral communication, learners should not monitor too much since it would hinder communication. When expressing in writing, learners have enough time to monitor and consider its accuracy.

The Input hypothesis is the most important concept in Krashen theory. The concept of comprehensible input attracts many researchers and teachers in SLA. Krashen argues language

acquisitions should follow “i+1” principle, which is the core of the Krashen’s SLA theory [3]. When language learners are exposed to massive “i+1” language material, they will naturally and unconsciously acquire a new language while understanding the meaning.

The Affective Filter hypothesis concerns every emotional factor that would block the comprehensible input into the “Language Acquisitions Device” [3], including motivation, self-esteem, anxiety. When the affective filter goes down, the language learners will forget they are hearing and using another language for the moment. Therefore, they will acquire the target language naturally and unconsciously.

The Natural Order hypothesis states that people acquire the language rules in a way that is predictable. The hypothesis distinguishes two different language acquisitions system. Nature order reflects the process of acquisitions and control by the “acquisition syllabus”. Teachers using the “a learning syllabus” in the class to teach language to their students should know later syllabus cannot change the acquisition syllabus.

3. Krashen’s Input Theory

By reviewing the Krashen theory of SLA, he answered the critical questions of how we acquire language [3]. His Input Hypothesis proposal is based on the difference of the acquisitions and learning. Krashen [3] argues that the language learning and language acquisitions is different. Language learners should obtain the meaning of the language first then learn the structure and the form of the language. The ideal input hypothesis can be generalized under the following statements:

The input has to be comprehensible for acquirers, otherwise the input would become interference for language learning.

The material of the input should be interesting to language learners and consists to language learning.

The aim of the input serves for language acquisition not for language learning, therefore the input did not follow the natural order of the language grammar rules.

The key to language acquisitions is gaining enough comprehensible input (C.I.).

The input hypothesis has highlighted the meaning-focus instead of form-focus. The C.I. plays an important part in language acquisitions. The linguistic environment provided by the mentor should consist “i+1”.

3.1 “i+1” Hypothesis of Input

Krashen argues that the ideal learning pattern of the language is “i+1” [3]. “i” presents for the language existing level of the learners; “1” stands for the next level of language ability that slightly higher than the existing level. SLA learners need to receive massive of the “i+1” language learning material when they start the process of SLA. Its theory indeed, has given lots of insights to researchers of SLA and therefore inspire them to testify his model of language learning. Krashen [3] holds the view that “i+1” model is one of the best ways for learners to acquire language. Some researchers like Jordan [1] criticized the theory and consider that the five hypotheses are imaginative and subjective, which cannot be verified by empirical research methods. The “i+1” apparently contains some blanks since Krashen never quantifies the “1” and some researchers in China also do not credit its hypothesis, thus view it as Krashen’s own assumptions [2]. Nonetheless, Krashen’s hypothesis of “i+1” still gains its charming in the field of SLA.

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3.2 The Application of Krashen's Input Theory

In the SLA classroom, Krashen's Input Theory has gradually been applied all over the world [4-6]. By reviewing the recent work of some researchers, the researcher finds the application of the Krashen's theory in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language) classrooms of China [4]. Teachers in China applied the pattern in English teaching mission and perceived the input theory could uplift language learners reading motivation and reading competence [5]. From the analysis of the questionnaire in elementary school English class in Nanjing, China, students have widely accepted the new reading material and teaching methods based on the Krashen input theory. The researcher organized 80 students to construct the experiment, divided them into the experiment group that would receive extra reading English material and mentoring through Krashen idea and the normal group without extra help following the normal syllabus of the school. The experiment was conducted for one term and obtained encouraging results.

According to the results of Zhang's research, the motivations for learning English were improved after the experiment.

In terms of interest in reading materials and active reading, the experimental group was 20% higher than the control group. It can be seen directly that using Krashen's input theory for teaching attempts can help stimulate students' interest in active reading. Before the experiment, 13 students dislike English reading. The numbers drop to 6 after the experiment. More importantly, it was shown that their reading levels had been developed after the experiment. It suggested Krashen's input theory experiment required constantly reading input. The aim of the reading was connected to learner's own experience and promoted students' own thinking to lead to the reproduction of the language information. When teachers constructed the Krashen input should provide massive authentic and natural-occurring language materials such as daily conversation storybooks to SLA learners.

However, after reviewing Krashen's Input Theory, below are the main arguments:

(1) The "i+1" time management factors in SLA, should be arranged according to the age of the acquirer and the time contacting with their L1.

(2) Caretaker should match the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with the input theory.

(3) The ideal resources of "i+1" given by caretakers to acquirers do not necessarily come from the classroom.

"i+1" time arrangement: When introducing "i+1" into language teaching, learners' age, and degree of L1 influence should be considered in class planning. Krashen neither quantified the "1" in his research of input hypothesis but giving a vague concept and did not systematically discuss the degree of L1 influence. What if the "i+2" or "i+3", do these methods can surpass the "i+1"? Different acquirers' age is a variable that should be considered. With the increase of age, learners would gain more about their L1. According to some researchers, there is a "sensitive period" of language learning [7, 8], which will start from a young age and end earlier to puberty.

Once the acquirer passed the period to learn a new language, the acquirer will first recognize it through their L1 (e.g., Grammar, vocabulary, and context). Taken the Canada French Immersion Program as an example, the immersion processes started in early-stage were 100% immersion. The late immersion took place in grade 7, when students have already acquired their L1. The teachers would use 25% as the L1 to lead the class. The models of the bilingual immersion class can show the input theory of how massive learning material is crucial but also should consider the length of year that acquirer contact with their L1.

Table 1 Canada French Immersion Class Study

(a) Time allocation of Early Complete French Immersion Education [9]

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
French Immersion Time (%)	100	100	100	80	80	70	65	30	30	30	30	30	30

(b) Time allocation of late French immersion education

Grade		7	8	9	10	11	12
French Immersion Time (%)	/ / / / / / /	75	75	30	30	30	30

“i+1” & ZPD & Input hypothesis: By reviewing the SLA theories, the author finds the idea of the “i+1” has some aspects that can match with the ZPD (Zone of the Proximal Development) proposed by Vygotsky [10]. Vygotsky perceived a potential development zone in learners, where there is a gap between the existing language level to the next higher level. And children need others who have higher L2 language proficiency (e.g., their mentor, teacher, parents) to help them to get to the next level. To get to the ZPD requires teachers or mentors to guide the learners. Cook [11] proposed people cannot teach things that currently out of the learner’s reach; that is similar to the comprehensible input of the Krashen. In order to get the ZPD, the comprehensible input is crucial. However, Krashen claims the language ability cannot be taught directly [3]. People can only acquire language in natural ways as the same as the L1. It ignores teachers’ perspective and characters in SLA. However, the learners would access the large language material without the proper “scaffolding” from the mentor. The time of the language acquisitions would be extended. As the SLA learner, teacher and acquirer should realize similarity and difference. The ZPD emphasizes the active construction of language learning from mentor and acquirer, while “i+1” are passively accepted higher language input than its current level.

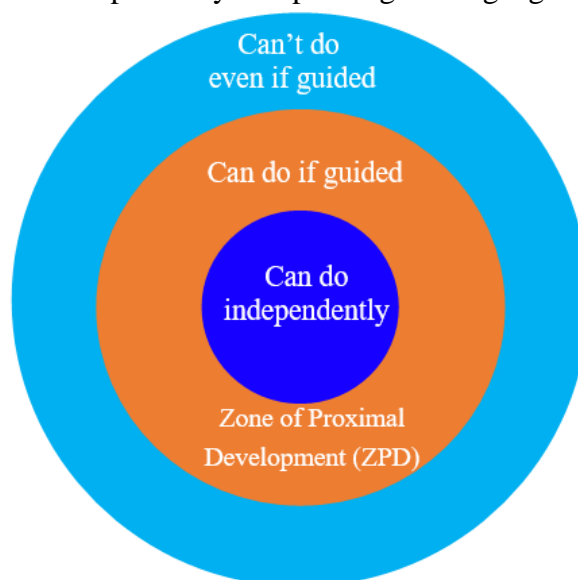


Figure 1. Zone of Proximal Development (cited from [1])

“i+1” resources: The ideal “i+1” resources are not only come from the language learning class. The following example is an strong evidence that can support author idea.

In Siem Reap, Cambodia, a little boy called Thuch Salik can speak 9 different languages (e.g., English, German, Mandarin, Cantonese) when he interacts with his customers [12]. Not only the common daily greetings, but he can also communicate fluently with tourists in different languages about commodity transactions. Thuch had shown clear pronunciation and sentences in each languages. From the report, Thuch obviously has never been to the form class to learn these languages. He learned these languages through communicating with different language users and learning certain expressions from the tourists. In the language context of selling souvenirs, Thuch is fluent in speaking. However, it is difficult to manage whether Thuch can transfer these languages into other contexts (e.g., teaching, writing) with high language proficiency.

Krashen argues (a) language acquisition requires target language input; It is the tourists who had created an atmosphere fulfilled with “i+1” learning material. Thousands of tourists come to visit the Angkor Wat, Thuch get access to different target languages. Everyday, the boy communicates with tourists and gets customers’ feedback directly and immediately. Tourists ensure the boy access to

massive language input. Therefore, Thuch, as a language learner, could acquire the target language and get practice with native language users.

(b) The input must be valid and comprehensive. From the website, the conversations around with tourists and the boy were related to the selling products and daily greetings. This is a very classic second language commercial context practice. Tourist and Thuch would not use very complex language forms and difficult lexical vocabulary. Tourist simplified the language and encoded process in order to make the boy understand their demand and get the goal of communication. According to the Krashen's theory, valid input should be comprehensible and interesting. Language learners must understand the input and focus on processing comprehensible information. Once learners focus their main attention on understanding the structure and complex concepts of the language, the input loses its true purpose to a certain extent.

(c) It should be followed now and then principle: Krashen argues that the input process should follow the now and then principles since the language acquisition can only occur in a real context or immediate environment that concerned both learners' and speakers' common interest [3]. Thuch has to promote sales to tourists, and their conversations happen in actual commercial contexts. The principle of "here and now" language material would give the acquirer the [3] "extra-linguistic support(context)". Under the authentic context, language learners can promote effective communication activities and get rid of the interference of the mother tongue thus provide "i+1" to language learners.

Thuch understands approximately what tourists mean. The boy has rough ideas about some expressions of tourists and reproduces the target language in appropriate situations. He may start from one word and gradually getting more complicated. It has given the EFL teachers and learners insight that create authentic and effective communicative context is crucial. The input should be massive and given task or mission during the language activities in or out of the class. Teachers can emulate the context in or out of the class. We should notice that the boy received massive input and reproduced the language information with the tourists to get success of the communication. Krashen [3] argues that when communication succeeds, the "i+1" has already involved in the process. Language learners acquire the target language. From the author's point of view, language learners cannot just have the input only but also produce reasonable output. When the learners initially start to build an expression, they start to build an understanding of the target languages.

4. Influencing Factors of SLA: affective filter hypothesis

The affective filter hypothesis was also accused by some researchers: Krashen [3] argues that emotional factors would directly affect SLA. The emotional factor can generalize in three parts: (1) motivation, (2) self-esteem, and (3) anxiety.

- (1) Students who are more motivated do better in language acquisitions.
- (2) Students with more self-esteem, more self-confidence do better in language acquisition.
- (3) The correlations are negative: the lower the anxiety, the better that language acquisition [9].

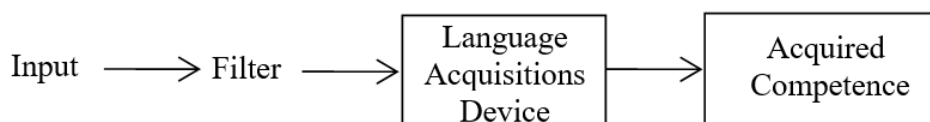


Figure 2. Language Acquisition And Comprehensible Input and revised Based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis [6].

When students or language learners think that learning a language under the pressure of exposing their weakness, he may show the feedback on the input, but it would not penetrate. The input would not get into the LAD that processing the language in the brain [13]. Krashen claims that an affective filter would function when the language learners sense the pressure. If the teacher failed to ease the learners' pressure, low motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety, the filter would block the input out. However, Krashen may not consider the class size of the EFL. The class size could also affect its

input reached. Regarding class size, the bigger class, teachers, or mentors may not take care of each student's feelings and problems. There is a negative correlation between class size and students' learning motivation and affects the class's effectiveness. Class size goes bigger then students would feel teachers pay less attention to themselves, especially for the students sit far from the teacher. The small scale of the class size is small would help teachers and students establish a good relationship and promote interaction in the class. Students would tend to pay much attention and effort into the class.

5. Conclusion

Krashen's input theory and affective filter have enlightened many research areas in the field of SLA. When reviewing his work, we still can get some insights into planning the class or self-study. The input theory demonstrated the importance of the comprehensible input for learners. It does not let the learner focus on the complex of language concepts and format, which could pressure the learners, especially when they first access the language. For learners and teachers of SLA, we should get meaningful language input, try to emulate the authentic situation for the learners, to give them a chance to reproduce the language on their own. Teachers and mentors need to play a role in getting learners to the ZPD, playing the roles on scaffolding.

How much external and internal pressure should be given to language learners that can reach better language acquisitions? In the case of Thuch Salik, he was taking the risk of losing business. He had to reach the communication with foreign tourists. If he can succeed in the street, can he replicate his "language talents" on the class? He is now studying at the Hailiang Foreign Language School, a private school in eastern China, thanks to the help from the donors and charities. Whether this kind of "language talent" also appears in these children who sell goods with Thuch, future research can focus on these children. We have reviewed the researchers work focus on the SLA and Krashen works. Some interesting questions should be done with more specific experiments in future to support his hypothesis and also contain the arguments discussed in the paper.

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