

# The Implications of the Input Hypothesis for College English Vocabulary Teaching

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary teaching plays an important role in college English learning. For many students, they are still struggling to find effective ways of accumulating words. In the field of second language acquisition, the classical Input Hypothesis has attracted more and more researchers' attention. After an analysis of current learning condition of college students, this paper explores the implications of the theory to college English vocabulary teaching in details, and some effective teaching methods can be tried to improve the teaching effect.

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary teaching plays a vital role in language teaching. British linguist Wilkins D.A once said that without grammar one couldn't convey much information, without words people couldn't express anything (Wilkins.D.A., 1982). With the development of vocabulary teaching research, many different teaching methods have been proposed. These new ideas bring great inspiration to the English teachers, but also make them encounter various problems in the practice process. Therefore, how to improve the teaching efficiency and effect in class is an urgent problem to be solved.

## 2. Difficulties in college English vocabulary teaching and its causes

In order to realize the English teaching goal in college, it is necessary to analyze the learning needs of students and completely understand them.

### 2.1 Changes in learning objectives

In middle school, most Chinese students study English for exam-oriented purposes. To get into colleges and universities, they learn English simply to improve their test scores but ignore the use of the language. Mastering skills at exams by doing lots of practice is the experience of each of them. As a result, they can often intuitively find the right answer to a question without understanding why they choose it. This phenomenon is quite common. After entering college, students' English learning goals have changed significantly. They realize that being able to express their ideas accurately in English proves their language ability much more than their high accuracy rate of answering papers. Then, improving real English ability is taken as their goal. However, because their foundation of language use is not solid, the switch between the previous goal in middle school and present goal in college makes learners feel great pressure.

### 2.2 Struggling to find effective vocabulary learning methods

With the change in learning objectives, students put more emphasis on using vocabulary for communication. Once simple memoriter learning and exercises-stuffed learning are no longer applicable, they are eager to find some more effective vocabulary learning methods. However, when the results do not meet the expectations, the arduous process of language learning will make many of them lose confidence and even lose interest in English.

## 2.3 The adjustment of teaching objectives

English teaching in middle school mainly focuses on the accumulation of vocabulary, grammar and other basic knowledge. But college English teaching has stepped into a higher level, which requires the comprehensive improvement of students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills. In class, teachers often need to guide students to understand the details of the English texts at a deeper level, such as understanding the author's writing background, purpose, intention, expression of ideas, etc. By learning the author's writing skills and the use of words, it is helpful to eventually achieve the goal of fluent expression of thought and cross-cultural communication. These objectives determine that teachers can only use limited time to assist students to learn vocabulary in lecture. If the teaching methods they use are not efficient, obviously, it will not be able to bring a positive impact on students.

## 3. Input hypothesis theory

Based on the analysis of students' needs, how teachers in college teach English words with high efficiency in class is a problem that need to be adequately resolved. In the early 1980s, an outstanding linguist --- Krashen proposed the Input Hypothesis theory which caused a great deal of reaction. This theory has a profound impact on the study of second language acquisition, and is even called the most comprehensive and acceptable theory in that field (Li Bingyi, 2005). Krashen emphasizes the importance of language input in it, and proposes that if effective and ideal language input can be carried out, language acquisition will be a natural process. According to him, there are also four characteristics of ideal language input. The inputs should be comprehensible, not grammatically sequenced, interesting and relevant, and should be of sufficient input ( $i + 1$ ) (Krashen, S.D., 1982). These rules summed up by analyzing the process of second language acquisition bring great inspiration to college English vocabulary teaching. Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, effective methods of vocabulary teaching could be explored from a new perspective.

## 4. Implications for college English vocabulary teaching

### 4.1 Sufficient input

One of the four characteristics of an ideal input mentioned by Krashen is typically sufficient input. It can be summarized as a formula " $i+1$ ". " $i$ " refers to the learner's present linguistic competence. " $i+1$ " stands for the language input slightly higher than the learner's current language level. Only with enough input slightly above the existing language level can language be acquired naturally (Zhang Weidong, Shen Dianmei, 2020). Therefore, if second language learners want to acquire language, they must take sufficient input as the premise and basis.

How to enrich English input in an ideal state in class? First of all, the quantity needs to be met. Teaching students the pronunciation, semantics and usage of words in isolation can no longer meet the needs of natural language acquisition because the vocabulary input also has to be qualitative. It should be slightly higher than the students' current level. Too low or too high level of language input will not help learners. In order to achieve this goal in classroom teaching, teachers should make full preparation by using the professional knowledge they know. For example, in English lecture, old and new words can be woven together and presented to students through different semantic relationships, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and meronymy, which are four common relationships. One of them can be chosen to enrich students' vocabulary input, or some of them are interactively organized according to one English word. In fact, this is also a good use of another classical theory in linguistics: semantic field. Semantic field is one of the ways in which words exist. In the field, there is a clustering relationship between words, and words belonging to the same semantic field coexist and exist side by side (Yao Xiaoping, 2006). Thus, to meet the requirements of vocabulary input, a set of words closely related to the word to be taught can be presented to students at a time. Let's take "giggle" as an example. While teaching it, words with the meaning of laugh such as smile, laugh, grin, roar, snigger, cackle need to be given together with giggle in lecture in order to help students understand, compare

and memorized. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine that this teaching method of words ensures vocabulary input from both angles of quantity and quality.

In addition, word formation using roots and affixes can also help teachers realize the same goal. Roots and affixes are very basic and common ways of forming English words, they can be used to enrich the input in teaching vocabulary in class. For example, "semi-" is a prefix for "half", it makes some new words like semifinal, semiconductor, semi-colony, semi-commercial, semiautomatic and so on. What's more, "form" is a root that means "make shape" or "way sth. is". It helps generate the words as formal, formation, formalism, formula, reform, etc. Such rich inputs with strong logical relevance are bound to effectively help students expand their vocabulary.

#### **4.2 Interesting and relevant input**

The fun of language input actually stems from Krashen's emotional filtering hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that anxiety, learning motivation, self-confidence and other factors can filter language input. What's more, emotional filtering is unconscious, caused by a lack of confidence or anxiety (Krashen, S.D., 1985). That is to say, when learners feel anxious, lack of motivation and self-confidence, emotional filtering will increase, and vice versa. Therefore, teachers should try to create a relaxed learning atmosphere in class to help students reduce emotional filtering and then reduce learning resistance (Liu Wei, Lin Wenjuan, 2015). Only in this way can sufficient words input in class be resultful.

There are two ways to make vocabulary input more interesting: choose interesting input materials and use interesting input methods. If the learning knowledge is connected with something fun it will deepen the impression of English learners. For example, audio or video materials that contain the word information can be shown by multimedia when it is explained by teachers in class. Vocabulary learning can also be combined with something familiar in daily life. This not only pays attention to the practicality of language but also increases its reproducibility. Furthermore, diversity of classroom activities plays an important role in enlivening the learning atmosphere. According to different learning contents, students can be organized to do group presentations, discussions, competitions and other activities. It will greatly change the traditional teacher-centered model. Let the students become the real leader and beneficiary of classroom learning by developing their confidence and strengthening their motivation. Thus, their learning efficiency will be greatly improved.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In recent years, the Input Hypothesis has attracted more and more attention from language researchers and educators. It has had some success after applying it to English teaching. However, few studies have considered applying it into English vocabulary teaching. In fact, it is not difficult to find that this theory also brings a lot of inspiration to college English vocabulary teaching. Teachers can use it to enrich classroom teaching methods, improve teaching effects, and provide more help to students in English acquisition.

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