



# The Concept, Content and Implication of Krashen's Input Hypothesis

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**Abstract.** Among the many theories of second language acquisition, Krashen's "input hypothesis" is far-reaching and controversial. Krashen's input hypothesis has laid a foundation for the study of second language acquisition and played a positive role in guiding foreign language teaching. However, there have been some objections to this hypothesis, including concept definition, theoretical basis and language output. Therefore, the author believes that it is necessary to summarize the current research results of the scholars. This paper introduces the content of the "input hypothesis" and its famous  $i + 1$  theory then reviews the empirical research of some experts and scholars, points out its limitations, and a large number of research reports of experts and scholars were retrieved, and the literature was classified and reviewed to clarify the development of the hypothesis in the field of second language acquisition and the future research direction, and provide reference and inspiration for the specific application of the hypothesis in the field of second language teaching.

**Keywords:** Krashen · Input hypothesis ·  $i + 1$  theory · Second language acquisition

## 1 Introduction

Krashen's monitor model is one of the most dominant models in the field of second language acquisition, which includes five sub-hypotheses. This paper mainly focuses on one of the sub-hypotheses of the five hypotheses, which is named "The Input Hypothesis".

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Background of the Input Hypothesis

The  $i + 1$  theory is the essence of the "input hypothesis" proposed by Krashen in the theory of second language acquisition. However, the actual input hypothesis was not pioneered by Krashen. As early as 1972, Macnamara had proposed an input hypothesis to explain children's language acquisition. In the same year, When Asher studied the characteristics of children's acquisition of their mother tongue, he found that the

order of second language acquisition should be input (understanding) first, and output (expression) second. Later, Wagner Gough and Hatch answered many of the questions about second language acquisition with the same idea. They argue that language input is essential for both second language acquisition and its research [1].

## 2.2 The Concept of Input Hypothesis

According to Krashen, the most basic way for people to acquire language is to understand and comprehensible language input, comprehensible language input is an essential condition for language acquisition [2]. Comprehensibility does not refer to the understanding of form, but to the understanding of meaning. The language material that the learner receives must be subtly higher than the learner's grasp; It is both intriguing and related, meaning that the input of language can stimulate sufficient interests and be tightly related to real-life; Non-grammatical program arrangement, learners do not have to entirely follow the acquisition order of grammar programs to acquire a language, language acquisition is produced in a natural surroundings; Sufficient quantity, just a large quantity of language input, that is, a large number of listening or reading [3].

## 2.3 The Content of the $i + 1$ Theory

Krashen believes that humans can only acquire comprehensible input to acquire language [4]. That is, the only way people can acquire language is through comprehensible language input. The so-called intelligibility of language input, expressed by the formula, exists " $i + 1$ ", where  $i$  represent the current level of the language teacher, and " $1$ " represents the knowledge that exists slightly higher than the existing level of the language teacher. If the language input they obtain is far more beyond the learner's existing level, " $i + 2$ ", or close to or even lower than the learner's existing ability level, " $i + 0$ ", then they cannot obtain enough comprehensible input, either too difficult to understand, or too simple [5].

Krashen argues that the provision of an " $i + 1$ " must have the following basic conditions:

First, language input must be comprehensible. This is a prerequisite for second language learners to inhale language input, because only after the learner turns input into intake, its internal mechanism begins to operate, LAD begins to function, and language level is likely to improve. Thus, Krashen has made the ability to provide students with comprehensible language input as the primary function of a good foreign language teacher.

Second, the language input must be massive in sufficient quantity. As we all know, foreign language learners will have a "silent period" in the learning process. Although it is not clear how much language input the learner needs to obtain to end this period of silence, nor how much language input is needed to enable the learner to use the language knowledge he has learned to communicate in discourse.

Third, the input should be interesting and relevant. From the perspective of educational psychology, this involves the emotional factor of the learner. In the process of providing input, teachers should focus on the expression of content and the transmission of information, not on the form of language. The purpose of this is to stimulate the

learner's interest in learning, to allow the learner to enhance their confidence in learning a foreign language on the basis of being able to understand the input, to reduce or eliminate the learner's sense of anxiety, to keep them in a good mood, to feel that foreign language learning is a pleasure, to be an exploration, and even to make them "forget" that this is information that is coded in a foreign language [6].

## 2.4 Empirical Research on Input Theory

Regarding the effect of input frequency on acquisition, Hatch, Wagner-Gough found that the frequency of various question sentences in language input correlated with their acquisition order, but Durlay, Burt's study of the order of English morphemes acquired in children and Bailey and Krashen's study of adult bilingual acquisition showed that the order of acquisition of basic morphemes was similar and did not seem to be determined by the input [7]. Ellis and Heimbach found that interactive adjustment inputs did not work for children who were reluctant or did not know how to interact with teachers [8]. Mackey also agreed that learners who actively participated in meaning negotiations scored significantly higher than those who did not [9]. Long argues that comprehension of input is a necessary condition for language acquisition and that adjustments in the structure of conversational interactions that arise during the negotiation of communicative problems help learners understand [10]. But Ellis's experiment proves that this view is not valid, indicating that Long's view is not recognized by everyone [11]. Gass believes that the main reason is that language output has not attracted enough attention from researchers, and output has traditionally been seen as an exercise in the knowledge that has been learned, rather than as a way of creating knowledge [12].

Some Chinese scholars focus on both oral and written aspects of the Input Hypothesis. Wang concentrated on memorizing 6500 words and common phrases for several months, and his reading ability developed rapidly, and he could also read the original works with relative ease. This demonstrates the importance and role of a large number of natural inputs in the acquisition of language vocabulary [13].

Another scholar Wang applied the research results to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, requiring students to reach the intermediate or level of spoken Chinese proficiency after training. After demonstrating a large number of inputs in practice, it is necessary to understand the output to effectively improve the Chinese level. Interpreting input assumptions from the perspective of teaching Chinese as a foreign language should be a relatively novel research direction. He proposed the "writing length method" in the teaching of writing, that is, to increase the length of students' writing. This method stimulates the entire input-output process by increasing the number of inputs, thereby promoting the improvement of language proficiency and the internalization and acquisition of native language skills. It is also possible to overcome the psychological barriers of native language learning and eliminate the interference of positive emotions [14].

Zhou studied the influence on spoken language output from the two input modes of reading and listening, and the corpus came from the College English Test-6 (CET-6) test recording. It was found that reading input had a greater effect on the complexity of speaking. He believes that oral language teaching should go beyond tradition and combine listening, speaking, and reasonable reading input [15].

## 2.5 Different Views of the Input Hypothesis

Yorio disputed Krashen's assertion that comprehensive input automatically led to language acquisition. He believed that people must pay attention to the learning environment of the second language and the specific and accurate learning goals. Blind "immersion" language teaching, while cultivating students to be "fluent", often leads to the rigidity and incompatibility of their language [16].

Rein Freudenstein's argument is intriguing, arguing that it is surprising that Krashen is so ignorant and perhaps blind to what has happened across the Atlantic for twenty-five years. He believes that Krashen's 1983 view in *The Natural Approach* turned out to be almost identical to that set out in 1971 by the Council of Europe; the teacher's classroom language to bring students comprehensible language input was proposed by Lado in 1964 [17]; the use of only target languages in the classroom was a topic of debate in Europe for a hundred years; the distinction between learning and acquisition was an old topic that distinguished learning types. He argues that there is nothing new in Krashen's theory, except that he uses new terms to express specious ideas [18].

Bill Van Pattern warns that when criticizing Krashen as fashion, be wary of ignoring the importance of language input. Van Pattern believes that one of Krashen's contributions is to emphasize to us the importance of language input through the input hypothesis and the idea that language acquisition depends on the learners themselves. Unlike Krashen, she believes that the conscious learning process is as important as the subconscious learning process to language acquisition [19].

## 2.6 Input Hypothesis Implications for Chinese Language Teaching

Through the analysis and understanding of the language input hypothesis, teachers should pay attention to the two aspects of "quality" and "quantity" in the language input they provide [20]. In terms of "quality", the language input to be provided to students must be slightly higher than the student's existing level of knowledge, but not too high [21]. Only the new knowledge provided to students that they can learn within their capabilities can be the information they receive automatically generate relevant language rules in the brain [22]. For example, stimulate students' critical thinking skills through extensive classroom discussions and debates; Use Roll-play to develop students' listening, speaking, designing and acting skills; Exercise students' presentation ability by taking the stage to explain themselves [23]. The use of contrast and comparative pedagogy to improve students' ability to observe things, etc. [24]. And in the examination assessment, student's performance in the classroom is taken into account, and a comprehensive evaluation of the student is made [25]. From the perspective of "quantity", teachers should not blindly enter the language of students in the classroom, but must also pay attention to the students' reactions when receiving language information [26]. Students' responses in the classroom are a good indication to the teacher whether the teacher has provided more language input than the student can handle, causing the language processing mechanism in their brain to shut down and refuse to process language or information [27].

## 2.7 Critical Appraisal

The author believes that Krashen blindly emphasizes the importance of intelligible input but ignores the importance of language output. Only input has no output, students can neither master a language, nor use this language, in our current foreign language teaching classroom we mostly take the form of input-output-intake, students in a large number of comprehensible input, through the form of memory and other forms of output language, and then through the practice of not segments to master the language, and in the teaching process teachers should take the form of input-intake-output, From input to intake, after a large number of comprehensible inputs, students form basic declarative knowledge, and then take a series of activities to enable students to master the language, and finally they can use the language freely.

## 3 Conclusion

In summary, according to the content of language input, this paper has analyzed and discussed the previous research progress and limitations of the three aspects of the input hypothesis. Although the input hypothesis exists its limitations, it still exists a considerable theoretical effect on the learner's comprehension of language.

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