

# The Influence of Krashen's Input Hypothesis on Teaching College English Listening in China

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## Abstract

Listening is the main task in college English language teaching. Listening comprehension of English is also a big obstacle for English majors. Most college students consider listening comprehension to be the most difficult aspect and the weakest part in students' English studying. Therefore, how to improve a college student's listening comprehensive ability becomes a hot topic among English teachers. This paper explains Krashen's Input Hypothesis, analyzes the current situation of listening courses in college in China, and the influence of Krashen's Input Hypothesis on college English listening. Thus, the English teachers can arouse the student's interest in learning English and improve their listening ability.

**Key words:** Krashen's Input Hypothesis; College English listening; Influence

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## INTRODUCTION

The importance of foreign language teaching has already been widely recognized. However, English learning for most Chinese students is always time consuming and fruitless. Facing the urgent need to improve the situation, Chinese researchers have carried out many theoretical and empirical studies with a shared purpose of finding a more effective way to promote the acquisition of a second language. Krashen's Input Hypothesis, with its wide

influence in the western language research field, impresses Chinese researchers as convincing, systematic, and having practical value for Chinese foreign language teaching.

This paper includes three parts. First, it explains Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Then, it analyzes the current situation of listening courses in college in China. The most significant part is the influence of Krashen's Input Hypothesis in college English listening. Thus, the English teachers can use the influence to improve their students' listening ability.

## 1. THE KRASHEN'S INPUT HYPOTHESIS

With the development of research in second language acquisition, some new theories and hypotheses have been put forward and examined by linguistics and language teaching professionals. Among them, the Comprehensive Input Hypothesis is the central part of this overall system. It pertains to the relationship between what the learner exposed to of a language (i.e. input) and language acquisition.

### 1.1 The Theory of Krashen's Input Hypothesis

First, the comprehensive input hypothesis claims that the acquirer should understand input language that contains structure a bit beyond his or her current level of competence. Krashen defined the learner's current stage of studying language as "i". The next stage of developing language is "i+1". In other words, the language which learners are exposed to should be just beyond their current competence. They can understand most of it, but still be challenged to make progress.

Second, people are able to understand language containing unlearned grammar structures through context, which includes extra-linguistic information and previously acquired linguistic competence.

Third, a significant part of the Input Hypothesis is Krashen's recommendation that speaking should not be

taught directly or very soon in the classroom. Learners will produce once the acquirer has obtained enough comprehensible input.

Fourth, Krashen assumed a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), that is, an innate mental structure capable of handling both first and second language acquisition. Input activates this innate structure.

## 1.2 The Characteristics of Krashen's Input Hypothesis

First, the comprehension. The necessary condition of language acquisition is to understand the code of language input. Incomprehensible input has no use to learners. It is just waste of time.

Second, interest and relevance. That is, the input material is interesting and relevant to each other. Thus, learners can grasp language more easily.

Third, ungrammatical sequence. The key to learning a language is having enough comprehensive input. Teaching language on the basis of grammatical structure is wrong. Krashen takes the view that "the teaching outline according to grammatical arrangement will destroy any real communicational try (Krashen, *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*)." It will make the input material boring.

Fourth, sufficient quantity. Krashen claims that "learning a new language not only needs several exercises but also needs continuous conversation and reading which is interesting and full of content (Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*)." Only by multiple readings and conversations can teachers increase the chance to provide  $i+1$  for students.

## 2. THE CURRENT SITUATION: PROBLEM FOR THE COLLEGE ENGLISH LISTENING COURSE IN CHINA

The requirement for teaching college English is to develop the competitive ability of students, especially the ability of listening and speaking. After reformation, TEM-4, TEM-6, IELTS, and GRE put forward higher requirements for students' listening ability. Therefore, teaching listening has become an important link of teaching college English. However, listening is one course that makes most students dizzy. Their general problem is that it is hard to understand and too fast to catch. Enhancing students' listening ability and advancing teaching efforts for listening courses is a problem that should be figured out urgently.

### 2.1 The Current Situation of the College English Listening Course

First, the traditional concept of teaching is deeply rooted in China. In recent years, all kinds of new teaching methods have been put forward. However, the traditional concept that "the teacher is the centre" does not change

greatly. Teachers still explain lessons sentence by sentence, trying to make students understand every word and grammar point. After one lesson, teachers are exhausted and students are sleepy. Because Students lack effective language input, they dare not open their mouths and make a mistake. This situation weakens the initiative of the students

Second, the influence of exam-oriented education. Since TEM-4 and TEM-6 examinations were used in 1987, students focus on tests. After graduation from college, students enhance the job market of talent. Certificates become a treasure to have when hunting for a job. In some colleges there is a rule that college students must pass the TEM-4. Otherwise, they cannot graduate or obtain degree certificates. Thus, students do plenty of exercises to pass the examination and acquire the certificate. Then they will forget how to use English in an actual communication.

Third, students' foundation of English is weak and learning methods are not scientific. As colleges continuously enroll many new students, the quality of study is deeply influenced. This results in that their foundation of English is generally weak and the quality of their English listening course is not strong.

Fourth, the boundless in the process of teaching. The pattern of teaching is monotonous and rigid. As the score of listening occupies a main part of the aggregate score, college teachers pay more and more attention to listening teaching. This kind of class often has three procedures. The students listen to a tape answer question, and teachers correct the answers. Students are under pressure from testing and lose interest in the learning listening course.

### 2.2 The Existing Problems of the College English Listening Course

At present, English listening and speaking has gained some success, but there are still several problems that should be studied to make more progress.

First of all, the teaching material is aged and sterile. Language as the carrier of society should make progress with the times. While our listening materials have been published for a few years, many kinds of hot topics are not covered and the content of teaching materials has little relevance to the social problems and social environment of the students. In addition, the repeated exercises make the atmosphere of the classroom depressing and students dizzy.

Secondly, the teaching process is not arranged step by step. Many sophomores complain that the intermediate listening is more difficult than the primary listening. It can be assumed that the length of articles is longer, the vocabulary is more, and the scenes are more complicated and unfamiliar.

Thirdly, a listening course with two periods in a week does not give students enough input amount. A lack of input leaves teachers and students dependent on the

teaching material. Students rely on the limited materials and teachers do not guide properly or ask students to do homework. This may not only influence the advancement of listening ability, but also reduce the efficiency of learning language.

Finally, the traditional teaching method makes the listening lesson an analysis of grammar and structure lesson. When students cannot understand what they heard, teachers will explain the meaning sentence by sentence. Excessive grammar does not make students learn English naturally.

### 3. THE INFLUENCE OF INPUT HYPOTHESIS ON COLLEGE ENGLISH LISTENING

As the basic tool of communication, language is the carrier for listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. First, language should be the words people say, rather than the written text. The purpose of talking, of course, is for others to know and to realize, so listening plays an absolutely critical role in this process. Listening skills are important in language use as they are one of the primary means for obtaining verbal information. Good listening skills will help improve and consolidate other abilities. By using Krashen's Input Hypothesis Theory and because of the importance of the Chinese college English listening course teachers can solve the problem of teaching listening by using the input theory in the following three aspects.

#### 3.1 The Influence of Input Content

Input is the first step of language learning in actual teaching. Teachers should not only expand input channels of the training materials for listening, but also improve the scientific nature of the input materials. Listening materials should be authentic, understandable, and diverse in order to form an effective communicational process in order to improve student's interest in listening level. Authenticity refers to listening materials that are true to their nature. The premise is that a majority of students can understand the level of difficulty and speed of the materials.

In addition, in order to adapt to a variety of real life communication styles, it is necessary to use diverse input materials. Listening training should allow students access to touch a wide range of subject matters. In addition to the broad theme of life, social hot topics and natural sciences are also valuable. A wide variety of activities should be used: dialogues, monologues, news broadcasts, stories, discussions, songs, movies and other language materials can be used. In addition, the input materials should take into account the different voices of different regions like the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and other countries. The difference in the voice, accent and intonation cannot be ignored. Therefore, in the listening

classroom, teachers not only expose students to standard pronunciation, but also appropriately to expose students to different English pronunciations.

First, most of the grammar structures and words that appear in the listening materials are that students have learned.

Second, the speed should not be too fast or too slow. The majority of the students can basically understand the listening material. Only in this way can students obtain the necessary language input. If a student does not understand, how can language be acquired?

Third, teachers should understand students' different listening levels. Listening materials cannot be uniform, they should be chosen according to the different students' levels.

#### 3.2 The Influence of Input Means

Taking full advantage of information technology can improve the input means. The input content is not only the quality of the material, but also the amount of listening class level. The input means are important. Because of this, teachers should change the single traditional teaching methods and use diversified teaching methods to increase students' interest. Teachers adopt teaching methods to effectively access the key of language input. English listening teaching consists of three stages: pre-listening, listening and post-listening. In pre-listening, teachers appropriately teach the materials' background knowledge, characters and customs to make a brief introduction so that students know about it. In listening, teachers should guide students to seize the key words, important information and quickly record them. If students do not understand, teachers should repeatedly play. In post-listening, the teachers should organize students to repeat, summarize and discuss the contents of what they have heard to help them remember what they have heard.

In addition, in this informational society, teachers should make full use of multimedia tools and network resources to enrich their teaching of listening in order to enhance students' interest and initiative. Multimedia courseware can expand students' language input, open multimedia classrooms, and English FM radio stations can be used so that students can practice listening by themselves. Audio and video recording materials, English songs, classic films and online information resources can be used to enable students auditory and visual input, enhance students' interest, relax the mood of the students and reduce their anxiety.

Therefore, in the listening class teachers should first tell themselves and the students that listening ability tests and listening culture are two different concepts. Try to create a pleasant atmosphere of teaching and change from the teaching method of listening to questions and checking the answers. Make efforts to reduce the anxiety level of students. When choosing listening materials, teachers should not only consider the moderate difficulty and pace,

but also consider the interesting materials, and whether they comply with the age of the students. Interesting and diverse forms of listening materials enable students to feel relaxed, eliminate their anxiety, and inspires them to listen to the English material so they can understand language materials further and form impressions and memories of language forms to promote English learning.

Here are some easy methods to create an environment for listening.

Firstly, in the first five minutes of lesson, teachers can play one or two beautiful songs in English and describe the relevant background material to enable students to predict the content they will listen to. Students will feel relaxed, comfortable.

Secondly, pause half way during the lesson to put forward some questions. Encourage students to discard redundant words and excessively detailed information to reduce students' burden of memory. While students answer the text or teacher's questions, do not have them stand up to eliminate the tension of students.

Thirdly, divide the students into a number of activity groups to listen to material that is playing. The teacher supervises. The purpose of the classroom environment is to add fun and enable students to absorb and digest the material.

As an inspirer, teacher should teach dividedly to deal with consistent exercises in the textbook training mode to adapt to the task model or group discussions organized in the form of classroom learning and then stimulate students' interest. And as the letter information source, in the listening class teachers provide students not only the recording and answers but also the humanity background materials, especially the conflict, nuclear issue in Iran and other international hot events; practical English expressions, such as purchase objects, see a doctor and the airport scene terms must also be summarized in order to enrich students mind schema.

### 3.3 The Influence of the Method for Checking Input Effect

The most basic method for checking input effects is a test. However, this phenomenon often exists in actual teaching. Even if the difficulty level of the exam is lower than the difficulty of the practice, students cannot achieve good results. This is because listening comprehension is a complex psychological process. Psychologists tell us that when a person's mood is in a state of anxiety or boredom, their brains will be blank. The students having these problems during the exam are particularly anxious and their brains are often blank in front of the first few questions before their mentality are adjusted, eventually leading to no ideal result. Therefore, test designers can boldly try to give the candidates a "warm-up at the beginning of the listening test" (warm-up period). Before

the formal examination of a subject, do a few tests that are not included in the total score, so that students experience a process of adaptation to voice, tone, speed and other aspects. Practice tests will greatly reduce the degree of anxiety that may affect test behavior.

Students understand they need someone to give them an evaluation. This evaluation can detect students' learning levels, and at the same time, it also can help teachers evaluate and improve their own teaching methods. People know the self-evaluation is not reliable. Teachers' duty is to provide an objective evaluation, excluding the interference of other factors, to decide what is good or bad for students' listening comprehension. A researcher in the teaching experiment used two methods, questionnaire questions and oral questions (50%), to test students in the classroom listening comprehension. He detected the current level of students from time to time (an exam every two weeks), in order to provide students with new material (i +1). But note: Do not test students' ability to remember questions in order to avoid interference of language ability.

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## CONCLUSION

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Krashen's Input Hypothesis has great guiding significance on the power of teaching college English listening. This theory is operable and has wide applicability in teaching listening. The use of this theory can greatly increase the teaching effectiveness. Teaching of listening is long-term work. Improving the students' listening ability is a difficult process because teachers should base their lessons on the specific circumstances of the students' ability. The language input should be kept on the "i +1" level. At the same time, teachers should also use a variety of teaching methods and multimedia tools to enhance students' self-confidence, stimulate interest in learning English, improve teaching effectiveness and achieve the purpose of developing students' pragmatic competence.

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