On the Possibility of Integrating Krashen’s Five Hypotheses
With China’s Traditional ELT Methods

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Abstract:
In China, there is a serious situation that students who have studied English for more than ten years cannot communicate fluently though they have mastered the ability to read and write. Facing this phenomenon, more and more teachers and researchers are gradually becoming aware of some defects of China’s long-established pedagogic theories of ELT—the Traditional ELT Methods. Because of their advantages, they cannot be rejected completely. Krashen’s Five Hypotheses can be used to guide China’s ELT. In this paper, the author suggested a teaching model that combines the theory of Krashen’s Five Hypotheses with the Traditional Methods. In actual teaching practice, further testing is needed to test the validity and feasibility of the teaching model suggested.

Introduction:
In recent years, English language teaching (ELT) overseas has taken on a new character as a result of the need for many advanced students to use the language as a tool in the study of scientific and technical subjects. China, as an active member of the world community, also feels an urgent demand in this respect. However, there is a serious situation that even after years of schooling, some students who have passed Band 4 or Band 6 test are even found incompetent in their communication with native speakers in English. As far as this case is concerned, a large number of theoretical and empirical studies have been
carried out with a shared purpose of promoting second language acquisition (SLA) in a more effective way. Many teachers and researchers have devised some teaching methods in order to solve this problem, but some of these methods do not really work. Many teachers and researchers say that China’s language teaching is time-consuming and low-effective. How to optimize the learning situation in China to improve the acquisition of English becomes quite pressing. How to teach English in the classroom is an imminent problem facing all China’s English teachers and researchers.

Krashen’s five hypotheses about SLA are convincing, inspiring and systematic. His theory is powerful in the field of language teaching since it was put forward. This paper attempts to combine the theory of Krashen’s five hypotheses with the Traditional ELT Methods, in order to propose a feasible teaching model.

1. Krashen’s Five Hypotheses and Characteristics of Optimal Input

1.1 Krashen’s Five Hypotheses

Stephen Krashen proposed five hypotheses about SLA: the Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Among them, the Input Hypothesis is the central part of this overall system.

1.1.1 Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis

In the Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis, adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language. One way is language learning that is a conscious process of study and learners pay attention to form and error correction. The other way is language acquisition, which is a subconscious process similar to the way children develop the ability in their first language. According to Krashen, acquisition is the only way to gain full proficiency.

1.1.2 Natural Order Hypothesis

Natural Order Hypothesis claims that when people acquire the rules of language, there exists a predictable order. That means acquirers of a given language tend to acquire certain grammatical structures earlier, and others later.

However, in Krashen’s opinion, “the implication of the Natural Order Hypothesis is not that our syllabi should be based on the order found in their studies. Grammatical sequencing in all cases where the goal is language acquisition should be rejected” (Krashen, 1982).

1.1.3 Monitor Hypothesis
The Monitor Hypothesis concerns how acquisition and learning are used in speech production. Krashen clearly differentiates between acquisition and learning. He holds that learning can only serve as Monitor. It helps a lot when we make correction or change the output of the acquired competence before speaking or writing, while normally, acquisition “initiates” our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency.

1.1.4 Input Hypothesis

The Input Hypothesis is Krashen’s central concern and chief claim of his theory. It states that a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage $i$ to stage $i+1$ is that the acquirer understands the input that contains $i+1$, and in this case, “understand” means that the acquirer focuses on the meaning rather than on the form of the message.

Krashen claims that appropriate input is prerequisite for any successful language teaching. So he further sets forth the concept of Optimal Input and its characteristics.

1.1.5 Affective Filter Hypothesis

The Affective Filter Hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the SLA process. The Affective Filters include such things as motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. The filters will be “up” when the learner is tense, self-conscious, or unmotivated. In this case, he will take in little of the input. The filters will be “down” when the learner is relaxed and motivated. In this case, he will take in much or all of the input. That is to say, in order to accomplish the task of acquisition, comprehensible input is only a necessary condition, but it alone is not sufficient, because the acquirer needs to be “open” to the input. People should not put the acquirer “on the defensive”. Thus this hypothesis defines an English teacher in a fresh way. The effective teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation.

1.2 Characteristics of Optimal Input

1.2.1 Optimal Input is comprehensible

This is the most important characteristic of Optimal Input. “When the acquirer does not understand the message, there will be no acquisition.” (Krashen, 1982:63).

Comprehensibility is a necessary condition for language acquisition. So, teachers, in their teaching, must find some means, linguistical or non-linguistical, to promote comprehensibility.

1.2.2 Optimal Input is interesting and / or relevant
Successful language acquisition takes place when the acquirer focuses on the message rather than on the form. Therefore “the best input should be the one that is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may even ‘forget’ that the message is encoded in a foreign language” (Krashen, 1982:67).

1.2.3 Optimal Input is unsequenced grammatically
In acquisition-oriented materials, there is no need to deliberately include \( i+1 \), since it will occur naturally.

1.2.4 Optimal Input must be in sufficient quantity
It is hard to say just how much comprehensible input is necessary to achieve a given level of proficiency in SLA, due to a lack of data. Enough is known that “profession has seriously underestimated the amount of comprehensible input necessary to achieve even moderate or ‘intermediate’ levels of proficiency in SLA” (Krashen, 1982).

According to Krashen, if the practice of SLA is successful, it is necessary that the input imparted to the learner should possess the above characteristics.

Now in China, the prevailing ELT Methods are still the Traditional ELT Methods. Now, our attention will be put on the analysis of them to see whether they are fit for Krashen’s Five Hypotheses.

2. General Survey of China’s Traditional ELT Methods

2.1 Definition of the Traditional ELT Methods

The Traditional ELT Methods, as a general term, refer to the hybrid of Grammar-Translation Method, Audio-Lingual Method and Situational Method. These methods should not be seen as employed separately one by one. On the contrary, a comprehensive application of them is indeed a more objective description of the past history of China’s ELT.

2.2. Teaching Principles

1) The Traditional ELT Methods puts great emphasis on the use of language forms, but ignore the use of language in real communication.

2) Teachers are highly sensitive to mistakes students make on language forms and tend to correct all the mistakes whenever discovered while fluency of language is considered less important.

3) The teachers control everything that happens in the classroom while students are obedient and dependent characters.

2.3 Teaching Contents
1) The choice of teaching materials is, for the most part, guided by grammar and sentence patterns. Such materials often appear in the sequence of sophistication, “from easy to difficult” and “from simple to complex”.

2) Texts in the materials are mostly adapted or compiled to meet the need of grammar teaching. As a result, the usages in these texts usually seem unnatural and artificial and the authenticity of language is seldom cared about.

3) Generally speaking, students receive a little amount of input, owing to the shortened text, small vocabulary, restricted selection of the text and limited knowledge. Articles selected as texts are often of very little variation, in similar writing styles and with little change of language type.

2.4 Teaching Procedures
   1) Listen to and practise pattern drills first.
   2) Make up situations for further practice.
   3) Emphasize grammatical analysis, vocabulary and translation.

2.5 Advantages of the Traditional ELT Methods
   1) The Traditional ELT Methods can enable the students to build up a good foundation of grammar. Students can come up with new and correct sentences by practising grammatical structures and patterns.

   2) The Traditional ELT Methods make full use of students’ mother tongue. They make it easier for the teacher to explain abstract concepts, complicated structures and requirements of homework and, meanwhile, for the students to understand the teacher’s explanations.

   3) The Traditional ELT Methods tend to be more applicable to some special occasions as they do not need more language facilities.

   4) The Traditional ELT Methods exert less pressure on English teachers than other teaching methods do in terms of the demands on non-mother-tongue teachers’ listening and speaking abilities. Students rely very heavily upon teachers’ control. Thus, language class under this condition is often in good discipline.

2.6 Disadvantages of the Traditional ELT Methods
   1) The Traditional ELT Methods pay too much attention to language forms and grammatical rules, and ignore language
skills. Students taught with them tend to recite grammatical rules and vocabulary mechanically. However, they are unable to apply them correctly on the actual occasions of communication.

2) The Traditional ELT Methods limit not only the quantity of students’ participation in conversation, but also the quality of the conversational activities. The teacher-centred situation controls the whole teaching process from A to Z. There is little chance, in class, for students to ask questions or share ideas in conversation with the teacher or other students, and develop creative activities. As a result, many students learn English just to pass exams without learning to communicate. Many students complain that what they have learned is passive English.

3) The process of the Traditional ELT Methods is rather mechanical, dull and fixed. Usually, students feel depressed in such an “inflexible and formal” class.

4) The Traditional ELT Methods are grammatically sequenced. According to Krashen, this is not good for language acquisition.

2.7 Conclusion

The typical phenomenon that mirrors the mainstream of ELT in China is that students are strong in grammar, reading and translation, but weak in communicative competence. Today English is mostly taught in China under the guideline of the Traditional ELT Methods. From the above analysis, it can be seen that although the Traditional ELT Methods have their own advantages, these methods, for the most part, are inadequate in preparing Chinese students to communicate fluently in English. It is urgent that teachers should improve the Traditional ELT Methods so as to produce both linguistically and communicatively competent speakers.

3. Study on the Possibility of Integrating Krashen’s Five Hypotheses with the Traditional ELT Methods

Krashen’s five hypotheses about SLA have been widely recognized as “the best known and the most influential one in SLA literature” (Ellis, 1990). According to Krashen, acquisition is the only way to gain full proficiency. Now in China, the prevailing ELT Methods are the Traditional ELT Methods. Now, our attention will be put on the comparison of them to see whether they are fit for Krashen’s Five Hypotheses.

3.1 A Comparison of Krashen’s Five Hypotheses and the Traditional ELT Methods

Table 1: A Comparison of Krashen’s Five Hypotheses and the Traditional ELT Methods
### Traditional ELT Methods and Conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Krashen’s Five Hypotheses</th>
<th>Traditional ELT Methods</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition and Learning Hypothesis</td>
<td>They are language Learning, not acquisition.</td>
<td>The Traditional ELT Methods are contradictory to Krashen’s five hypotheses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Order Hypothesis</td>
<td>They are taught according to an order.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor Hypothesis</td>
<td>Use Monitor mostly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input Hypothesis</td>
<td>Most input is grammatically sequenced and not interesting. Most of Input is comprehensible, but the quality is not high.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Filter Hypothesis</td>
<td>The filters are up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 A Suggested Teaching Model

After reading Table 1, we can see that the Traditional ELT Methods are contradictory to Krashen’s Five Hypotheses. Is there any possibility of bridging the gap between the two? If it is possible, then a more feasible approach can be developed, which combines the advantages both of Krashen’s five hypotheses and of the Traditional ELT Methods.

According to Krashen’s five hypotheses and China’s present English teaching situation, the writer attempts to suggest an English teaching model (see fig.1). In actual teaching practice, further testing is needed to test the validity and feasibility of the teaching model suggested.

- Provided by teachers
- Reduced by teachers
This model begins with Optimal Input, which should, no doubt, be provided by teachers, and should be comprehensible, interesting and/or relevant, unsequenced grammatically and in sufficient quantity. Teachers can use proper ways to achieve this purpose. Then the input reaches learners’ Filters. This is a very important step in classroom teaching because whether these Filters are up or down determines the amount of input that can ultimately enter learners’ LAD. Teachers should employ some teaching techniques to reduce the negative effect of these Filters as much as possible, but even so, the amount of input that can reach learners’ LAD is, in most cases, less than that provided by teachers. Only after input reaches learners’ LAD, can they acquire linguistic competence. Then using this competence, learners interact with teachers and classmates in classroom, conversing and exchanging ideas with them. Teachers should try their best to encourage their interaction and participation. It should be added that any output produced by learners will be altered by their Monitor. So it is in interaction that learners can produce output, including proficient verbal performance and improved writing and reading abilities. In this model, among all the elements that are interrelated to each other, the requirements of input, the proper means of providing input and the ways to
reduce students anxiety are the essential factors that influence the whole teaching process and decide whether this integration is successful or not. If there is possibility of providing Optimal Input and helping make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation, then the new model can be carried out more appropriately to improve the quality of ELT in China.

Since many teachers and researchers have proposed many methods as to how to reduce the learners’ anxiety, this paper will not elaborate on them. The next section will only concentrate on some specific measures that teachers should take in order to provide the Optimal Input to learners. When Optimal Input is provided, the students’ anxiety can be reduced meanwhile. If we do have the possibility to provide Optimal Input, then, there is the possibility of integrating Krashen’s five hypotheses with the Traditional ELT Methods.

3.3 The Possibility of Providing the Optimal Input

3.3.1 The Possibility of Increasing Interest of Input

1 Encourage students to communicate naturally. Natural communication can arouse students’ interest more than artificial communication. Natural communication means that the learner focuses on the message being conveyed, rather than on the linguistic form. Many scholars prove that acquisition seems to occur best when language learners focus on the message and not on the form.

   ● Talk about something closely related to everyday life.
   ● Do not expect more of a learner than a proficient native speaker. If students cannot speak a sentence completely and grammatically at the beginning, do not force them.
   ● Put more emphasis on meanings, less on grammatical forms.
   ● Encourage and create situations where students can interact with native speakers of the target language as long as conditions allow.

2 Provide appropriate and comprehensible input to students.

3 Add to the vocabulary the current issues and useful phrases in class dialogues. It has been observed that learners master this kind of words and phrases very quickly. With these phrases, they can participate in social activities and interactions, which can arouse their interest.

4 Allow unplanned teacher-student interaction as a source of authentic language as well as language learning...
opportunities.

- Introduce relevant topics and news, with greater immediacy and flexibility than the course book can offer.
- Encourage learners to “play games with English” (Geertz, 1983), for this increases the likelihood of unpredictable interaction and learner involvement.
- Encourage students to chat. It is an important forum for drawing on local knowledge and social resources, and for adjusting lesson plans to immediate needs of interests.

3.3.2 The Possibility of Increasing Quantity of Input

China’s traditional classroom and its linguistic environment do not provide students enough opportunities to be exposed to sufficient input, but this disadvantage can be overcome by supplying sufficient input in class and outside of class.

There are mainly two ways to increase the amount of the input of the target language: listening and reading. In order to help students get as much input as possible, the teachers should handle the relationship between in-class input and out-of-class input dexterously.

First of all, teachers must know the level of their students and then give suggestions about what programs are the best for them to listen to and what materials are the best for them to get more input from. The following ideas are the ways to increase the quantity of input:

1️⃣ Provide more listening exercises.

Students can listen to English tapes with the help of some materials according to their own level. They can also listen to programs on the radio and watch English programs on TV. For example, the teacher can ask students to listen to programs like the special English on VOA and to write down what they have heard. By doing so, students can concentrate on the meaning instead of on the structure. Furthermore, students can know more about extra-linguistic information, such as world news, cultures, science reports and so on. This sort of information also helps students to enlarge their vocabulary. Students will remember those words and phrases that appear in the program frequently and know the usages of these words and phrases. Also, these programs can help students to improve their pronunciation, intonation and unconsciously build up the language awareness.

2️⃣ Provide more input of reading materials.
Krashen (1982) advocates the concept of “pleasure reading”. This kind of reading is extensive and concerns subject matters that students would read in his first language for pleasure. It is completely voluntary. In doing pleasure reading, readers have the option of skipping the whole sections they find either too difficult or less interesting. They have the option of putting the book or story down after reading a few pages and picking up another one. They can skip words they do not understand, if they think they are following the main point, and they have the option, of course, of looking up every word, if that is their style. This is the so-called “pleasure reading”. Teachers can give their students suggestions about what reading materials are most appropriate for them.

### 3.3.3 The Possibility of Improving Quality of Input

The following means can be used to attain the purpose of aiding comprehension and improving the quality of input:

1. **Use visual aids.**
   
   Visual aids, such as videotapes, films, TV plays and pictures, are surely helpful in facilitating comprehension, adding interest, lowering students’ affective filter and providing cultural information.

2. **Enlarge vocabulary.**

   Grammar-based approaches to language teaching deliberately limit vocabulary in order to concentrate on syntax. But it is suggested that the importance of vocabulary should not be denied, because with larger vocabulary, there will be more comprehension and with more comprehension, there will be more acquisition.

3. **Concern primarily with content, not with structures.**

   In giving input or in talking to students, the teacher needs to be concerned primarily with whether the students understand the message. Teachers need not be over concerned with whether the students are using certain structures.

4. **Use simplified input similar to caretaker speech and foreign talk.**

5. **Use first language properly**

   In foreign language learning, first language as a reference system is indeed very important. But teachers and students should also bear in mind that improper use of first language would discourage comprehensible input and hence spoil language acquisition. According to Krashen, this occurs when concurrent translation is used. At this moment, students just listen to the message in their own language and pay no attention to English input.
The following are some suggestions as to when and where to use first language in English teaching: 1) introducing background knowledge; 2) teaching translation skills; 3) correcting errors in pronunciation, segmental and super-segmental utterances.

6) Use “pleasure reading”

When using “pleasure reading”, the pleasure reader should be completely “off the defensive”. It is also helpful for the reader to break through cultural barriers because “pleasure reading” materials are comprehensive. Their scope can extend to various aspects of social life. Therefore, if the quantity of the “pleasure reading” is ensured, the reader can surely get as much cultural information as he wants.

3.3.4 The Possibility of Making Input unsequenced Grammatically

The Traditional ELT Methods are grammatically sequenced. Krashen holds that “If we focus on comprehension and communication, we will meet the syntactic requirements for Optimal Input” (Krashen, 1980, 1981). Grammatically sequenced methods cannot meet this requirement. However, teachers can alter their originally used methods and try their best to increase the quantity and quality of the input. Below are some measures that can be taken by teachers in their teaching (Krashen, 1982):

1. Class time is devoted primarily to providing input for acquisition.
2. Homework may include formal grammar work. Error correction is employed in correcting homework.
3. The goals of the course are ‘semantic’; activities may involve the use of a certain structure, but the goals are to enable students to talk about ideas, to perform tasks, and to solve problems.

3.4 Conclusion

According to Krashen, “Stated simply, focusing on communication goals provides far more comprehensible, meaningful input and encourages more language acquisition than basing the course on grammar. If we provide input over a wide variety of topics while pursuing communicative goals, the necessary grammatical structures are automatically provided in the input”(Krashen, 1982). Teachers should orient the input towards fostering communicative competence.

References


