Design Exercises to Balance Input and Output in K-12 Classroom

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Abstract

Based on Input Hypothesis and Output Hypothesis, the author discusses how to design exercises /tasks in k-12 classroom to achieve students' proficiency level of the target language and communicative competence in four levels: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. The author will explain the process of designing exercises by giving an example of how to teach the topic "sick". That is, how to design a serious of exercises that are appropriate for students' language level. The exercises will cover linguistic (lexical, structural, etc.), discourse, and ultimately, real life perspectives of learning and practicing Chinese. Through the illustration, the participants will get to understand how to design graded exercises to promote students' Chinese language acquisition process by taking account 1. teacher's pedagogical tasks 2. students' developmental state and skill level and 3. social contexts of the second-language learning environment. Participants will develop skills on: 1. how to increase students' discourse output (not simply sentential output); 2. how to set up certain lexical and structural complexity as practice condition; 3. how teachers create scaffolding practices; 4. how to prepare practices from mechanical drilling to connecting to real world experience. The author will use PPT to show illustrate: some theoretical basis and then show a detailed process of how to scaffolding students to achieve their language proficiency and communicative competence.

Keywords: *Input, Output, Exercises.*

Introduction

Input Hypothesis

Krashen is a pioneer in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and in K-12 class, his theory of Input Hypothesis has been widely used. He has made significant contributions to how to understand language learning process and how to lower the affective filter of thelangauge learners. His ideas have long been "a source of ideas for research in second language acquisition" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p.38)[6].

According to Krashen, the teachers should shift from rule-focused approaches, such as grammar-translation method and audiolingualism, to more meaning--based instructions, such as communicative language teaching (CLT). Till now, his theory has been the most widely accepted approach (Lightbown & Spada)[6].

Output Hypothesis

After Krashen's theory of Input Hypothesis, the output hypothesis, as another theory, has been widely used to guide in K-12 langauge classes. According to Merrill Swain (1997, p176) [10], "The output hypothesis claims that the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning". Output makes to move the learner from the semantic processing to the complete grammatical processing for accurate production. For Swain, constant practice facilitates the language learners to be conscious of their production and output makes them move from the semantic processing to the complete grammatical processing for accurate production.

Problems in Chinese Class

However, in the real classroom time, will comprehensible Input lead to effective Output?
In the language class, the Input theory has been used wideky to guide the language teachers on how to design the instruction focusing on making the lesson more comprehensible. However, Krashen's theory is considered to be "one of the most controversial theoretical perspectives in SLA in the last quarter of the

twentieth century" (Brown, 2000, p.277) [2]. In the Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1985) [4] claims that "comprehensible input" can lead to acquisition, however, as McLaughlin (1987) [8] criticized that Krashen failed to define the "comprehensible input" precisely. That is, he gave no clear definition. The word "comprehensible", which literally means "able to be understood" or "intelligible", can be explained differently(Birkner, 2016)[1] .

Plus, the ambiguity of what the i+1 make it harder to fully understand what "comprehensible input" means. Krashen first he explained that i refers to "our current level of competence" and i+1 means "the next level along the natural order" (Krashen, 1985, p.2) [4]. He talked about language learner's "level of competence". He then limits the type of competence to grammar alone and interprets i+1 as "structures at our next 'stage'". Therefore, Krashen is more inclined to a general level of competence in grammar than any specific structure, and is therefore criticised by Zafar (2010, p.97)[11] for failing to give "specific syntactic illustrations".

For Chinese languaage in a given topic, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. Here we will use some examples of teaching *Weather.*

Input:　今天刮风。　✓

Output: 今天有刮风。　✖

今天大刮风。　✖

今天有小刮风。✖

今天刮风很多。✖

Based on many different types of mistakes, we have to ask: is drilling pattern input necessary? Will comprehensible input enough? How to define good and effective output?

This can happen because of the negative transfer of native language, or the utterance can be provided by someone who does not have a good command of the target language. Eg: in english, when it has a big rain, you say "we had a big rain" or "it rained heavily", while in Chinese , you say 雨下得很大 , or 下大雨 了. It is differnt in terms of structure and sytax.

According to Swain, there is a possible connection between input and output. Output allows second language learners to identify gaps in their linguistic knowledge. As a result, langue learners attend to relevant input. Therefore, without minimizing the importance of input, the output hypothesis complements and addresses the insufficiencies of the input hypothesis by addressing the importance of the production of language for second language acquisition.

However, in real class, when the students have output, they make mistakes on grammatical function, which means mistakes on lexical and sentential level, such as 今天有刮风 or 今天大刮风. Therefore, they can not accomplish their communicative competence in four levels:linguistic,

sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic competence. Also, in most cases, they fail to realize the mistakes in these four levels . In most instances, they will learn the correct expression by getting correction or feedback from the teacher instead of self-directing and self-correction.

Solution

Before the language teacher design a class, things to consider are: 1. teacher's pedagogical tasks;
2. students'developmental state and skill level; 3. social contexts of the second-language learning environment.

Because students' acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language , so first of all, give the students meaningful contexts and natural communication in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.

Give more chances of the collaboration and interaction that students feel comfortable to work together. Cognitive science is finding that active, self-directed activities engage the brain in deeper, faster learning than sitting passively in class (Lovett, 2010) [7] . Language in this case will serve as a mediating tool,

which allows students to lead with the solving-problem process they encounter in the path of acquiring the second language.
Try learn phrases in chunks. Therefore, instead of knowing the individual meaning of each word, students learn how to create new sentences and phrases with big chunks of language units instead of words.
Give feedback is important, especially, because students need advices and corrections for improving their production if the self-correction won't happen.
Make each exposure to a piece of linguistic data helps students to gradually and naturally internalize language, which ultimately results in acquisition.

Conclusion

Comprehensible input is most conducive for language acquisition when it is in context, compelling and meaningful to students. However, sometimes in class, comprehension is not enough.
The native langauge is acquired spontaneously and in a genuine, natural, and most of the time, comunicative form after we are born.
There are different factors make comprehensible input conducive. There are useful ways to use to improve both student input and output: repeated exposure over time, make input that is either compelling or high-interest, relevant and/or personalized exchanges, have more chances of the collaboration and interaction, give the students meaningful contexts, and try to learn phrases in chunks.

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