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The Input - Output Loop in Continuation Writing Tasks: Reconciling Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Input - Output Loop Model in continuation writing tasks, aiming to reconcile Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. It elaborates on the model's components, operational mechanism, and synergy mechanisms. Pedagogically, it suggests curriculum design should shift from linear to cyclic, teachers act as cognitive mediators, and learners develop autonomy. The model integrates input and output, promoting language learning. It offers new insights into language teaching and learning, highlighting the importance of a balanced approach between input and output in continuation writing tasks for better language acquisition results.

1. Introduction

The teaching of English as a second language (L2) has long been influenced by two pivotal theories: Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. While Krashen (1982)emphasizes the primacy of "comprehensible input" (i+1) for language acquisition, Swain(1985) argues that "pushed output" is essential for grammatical accuracy and metalinguistic reflection. Although these two hypotheses emphasize the importance of input and output in language learning, they have certain limitations. The input hypothesis over-emphasizes the role of input and relatively neglects the positive influence of output in language acquisition, while the output hypothesis fails to elaborate the fundamental role of input on output to a certain extent. Continuation writing, a task requiring learners to extend a given text, inherently bridges this theoretical divide by demanding real-time integration of input comprehension and output production. Through continuation writing tasks, learners can apply the language knowledge and expressions in the input text to the output on the basis of their understanding of the input text, and at the same time, the feedback in the output process can further strengthen the understanding of the input, thus it is expected to realize the organic fusion of input and output, and provide a more effective way of language learning.

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2. Theoretical Framework: The Continuation Task as a Bridge

A foundational tension in second language acquisition exists between the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), which prioritizes comprehensible input ("i+1") for acquisition, and the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995), which argues that "pushed output" is crucial for developing accuracy and metalinguistic awareness. While the former has been critiqued for overlooking how input becomes cognitive "intake" (Gass, 1997), the latter arose from observing output deficiencies even in input-rich environments. This study posits the continuation writing task (Wang, 2012) as the pedagogical key to reconciling this tension. By design, it forces an integrated "input-output loop": learners must first comprehend a provided text (processing input) before producing a coherent extension (generating output). Empirical research confirms the task's efficacy in enhancing language accuracy, complexity (Jiang & Chen, 2015;(Wang & Wang, 2015), vocabulary learning (Jiang & Tu, 2016), and in creating text-alignment effects (Xin & Li, 2020), while pedagogical studies offer guidance for its classroom implementation (Wu, 2019; Jiang, 2022). Thus, continuation writing provides the ideal practical framework to operationalize and examine the synergy between these two core theories.

3. The Input-Output Loop Model in Continuation Writing

3.1 Components of the Model

3.1.1 Input Processing: From Passive Reception to Active Deconstruction

Input processing is a key part of the sequential writing process, which undergoes a shift from passive reception to active deconstruction. Traditionally, language input is often viewed as a passive reception of linguistic information by the learner, who needs to absorb the vocabulary, grammar and expressions in the material. However, in a continuation writing task, this passive reception is far from sufficient and learners need to engage in deeper active deconstruction.

When learners are confronted with the input text of a continuation, the first thing they have to do is to engage in an initial comprehension of the text, which involves identifying lexical meanings, analyzing grammatical structures and grasping the basic meaning of sentences. As comprehension deepens, learners begin to actively deconstruct the text. They dissect the chapter structure of the text, analyzing the logical relationships between paragraphs and how the parts work together to serve the theme. Through such analyses, learners can have a better grasp of the overall framework of the text and provide clear ideas for further writing. In the process of active deconstruction, learners will use their existing knowledge and experience to reconstruct the input text . They may connect the information in the text with their previous knowledge to form new perceptions . This process makes learners no longer passive receivers of information, but active

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participants, who are well prepared for subsequent output generation through in-depth analysis and understanding of the input text .

3.1.2 Output Generation: Cognitive Forging Under Input Constraints

Output generation is the central aspect in continuation writing, which is a cognitive forging process under the constraints of input . After learners have finished comprehending and analyzing the input text, they need to create a continuation based on this information, a process that involves several aspects of thinking activities.

In continuation writing tasks, the “forced output” mechanism compels learners to produce text that aligns with the input’s linguistic and thematic framework. This process activates Swain’s “noticing function”: when learners struggle to replicate complex structures from the input (e.g., subjunctive mood), they become aware of gaps in their knowledge. Hypothesis testing then occurs as they experiment with input-derived structures, such as mimicking dialogue tags to maintain narrative tone.

In the process of continuation writing, vocabulary selection, grammar usage, content conception and so on will be influenced by the input text, and learners need to integrate and process the input information, and use their own linguistic knowledge and thinking ability to make a reasonable continuation. This kind of cognitive forging under the input constraints not only improves learners’ language use ability, but also develops their logical thinking and creativity.

3.1.3 Feedback as Recycled Input: The Emergence of i+1’

Feedback, as recycled input, drives continuous language learning and prompts the emergence of new comprehensible input i + 1 . Feedback can be categorized into two types: self-feedback and external feedback. Self-feedback is the learner’s reflection and monitoring of his/her own linguistic expression in the process of renewed writing . Learners will unconsciously check their grammatical errors, the appropriateness of vocabulary use and the coherence of the content when they are writing, so that they can make corrections in time. External feedback comes from the teacher, classmates or other sources of feedback. Teachers may point out grammatical errors, such as subject-verb inconsistency, in learners’ continued writing and give the correct usage. Peer assessment is also an important form of external feedback . Classmates may offer their opinions from different perspectives, such as comments on the creativity of the story. These external feed-backs can provide learners with different perspectives and help them understand their writing more fully .

Both self-feedback and external feedback can be new inputs that drive learners’ language learning. Through feedback, learners can acquire new linguistic knowledge and expressions, and

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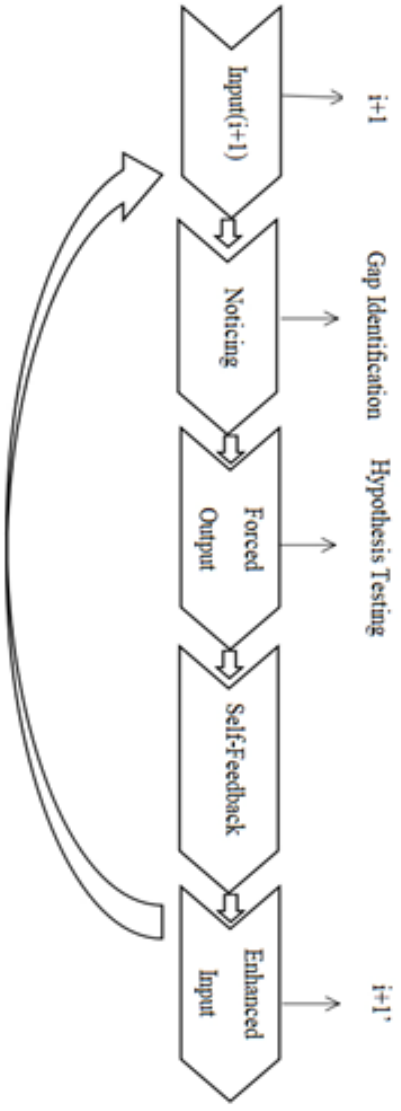
this new information constitutes i + 1' . The new information constitutes i + 1'. i + 1' is a higher level of comprehensible input based on the original comprehensible input i + 1 through the action of feedback.

3.2 Operational Mechanism of the Model

The input-output loop model in the continuation writing task is a dynamic, interacting process, and its mechanism of operation can be clearly demonstrated by the following flowchart (Figure 1):

Figure1-The Input-Output Loop Model



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3.3 Mechanism of Synergy

3.3.1 Lexical resonance

Lexical resonance is an important synergistic mechanism in the input - output cycle of continuation writing, which achieves the reinforcement of lexical networks through the repeated use of vocabulary and effectively enhances learners' vocabulary proficiency. When learners continue writing, the words in the input text form a preliminary lexical network in their brains. This network contains the basic meanings of the words, common collocations, and their usage in specific contexts. For example, when reading an article about travelling, learners will be exposed to travel-related words such as "destination", "scenery", "accommodation" and so on. These words are interrelated in the brain, forming a vocabulary network about travelling. In the output process, learners will repeat the words in the input text, which is a manifestation of lexical resonance. Through this repetition, learners can deepen their memory and understanding of the vocabulary and further consolidate the vocabulary network. Repeated exposure to input vocabulary and its reuse in output strengthens neural connections in the mental lexicon (Levelt, 1999). Over time, this resonance reduces lexical retrieval effort, enhancing fluency.

3.3.2 Syntactic priming

Input structures prime learners' syntactic choices via implicit memory (Bock, 1986). Syntactic priming refers to the fact that learners who are exposed to a particular syntactic structure will tend to imitate the use of a similar structure in subsequent linguistic expressions. When learners read an input text, the syntactic structures in it leave an impression on their brains. If the passive voice is used frequently in the input text, learners will form an initial perception of this syntactic structure in their brains. This stored syntactic structure will be activated when the continuation output is performed, prompting learners to imitate its use. Through imitation, learners can deepen their understanding and mastery of the syntactic structure and improve the accuracy and fluency of language expression.

3.3.3 Discourse coherence

By mimicking the input text's macro-structure, learners internalize genre-specific conventions (Bhatia, 1993). This enables them to produce coherent continuations. In continuation writing, maintaining discourse coherence is the key to ensuring that input and output are semantically and logically connected. Discourse coherence requires that the continuation writing task is semantically consistent with the input text and logically connected to form an organic whole. In terms of semantic coherence, learners need to have a deep understanding of the theme and core meaning of the input text to ensure that the sequel is centred on the same theme. In terms of logical coherence, the continuation writing task needs to be consistent with the plot development

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and cause-and-effect relationship of the input text. If the input text describes the creation of a problem, then the sequel should reasonably explore the solution to the problem, following the logic of cause and effect. In terms of stylistic style, the continuation content should be consistent with the input text, such as the input text is a formal academic style, the continuation part should not use too colloquial expressions. Through the comprehensive consideration and grasp of semantics, logic, structure and style, learners can achieve discourse coherence in the sequel, so that the input and output can be integrated with each other, and jointly promote the depth of language learning.

4. Pedagogical Implications

4.1 Curriculum Design

The traditional design of language courses often follows a linear pattern, with vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing and other segments being taught in sequence. This kind of design is likely to lead to fragmentation among the segments in actual teaching. Curriculum design based on the input-output cycle model emphasizes the concept of cyclic learning. This design regards language learning as a continuous cycle and a spiral process. In the curriculum arrangement, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar are organically integrated through reading and writing tasks.

When implementing the curriculum design of cyclic learning, teachers need to pay attention to the following points: Firstly, they should choose suitable input materials. The difficulty of the materials should be slightly higher than the existing level of the students to stimulate their learning motivation, but not too difficult so as not to undermine the students' self-confidence. Second, diversified renewal tasks should be designed to meet the learning interests and needs of different students. Third, we should focus on the timeliness and effectiveness of feedback. Teachers should give timely feedback on students' continued writing work, point out problems and give guidance. At the same time, students should be guided to conduct self-feedback and mutual assessment to develop their independent learning ability and critical thinking ability.

4.2 Teacher as Mediator of Cognitive Alignment

In teaching continuation writing based on the Input-Output Loop model, the teacher plays a key role as a cognitive coordinating mediator, a role that is crucial to facilitating students' language learning. Teachers should first guide students to effective input processing, in which they are provided with pre-task scaffolding, which includes effective reading strategies, skills, and cultural background knowledge. After students complete the continuation task, teachers should provide post-task metacognitive guidance. By facilitating text output comparison exercises, teachers should assess the plausibility, coherence, and fit of students' continuation writing

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content to the original text. In addition to direct feedback, teachers can guide students to conduct self-evaluation and mutual evaluation as a way to develop students' self-reflection skills.

4.3 Learner Autonomy

In continuation writing learning, developing learner autonomy is the key to enhancing learning outcomes. Learners need to take the initiative to plan the learning process, rationalize the learning time and select learning resources. When learning to continue writing, learners can make a detailed learning plan to determine the number of times and time for practice. Learners can also make use of online resources to search for relevant writing skills, model essay appreciation and other materials to enrich their learning. Self-feedback is conducive to targeted improvement. Learners can self-evaluate their work against the marking criteria after completing the continuation. Through this kind of self-feedback, learners can continuously adjust their learning strategies and improve their continuing writing skills. Self-adjustment is an important guarantee of learner autonomy, which enables learners to flexibly adjust their learning methods and strategies according to the results of self-feedback. If learners find that they have more problems in grammar in the self-feedback, they can increase the time for grammar learning and strengthen their mastery of grammar knowledge by reading grammar books and doing grammar practice problems. In order to better develop learners' autonomy in continuation, teachers can provide some guidance and support. Teachers can recommend suitable materials and learning resources for learners to continue writing according to their actual level. Teachers can also organize learning groups in which learners can communicate and share their learning experiences and insights with each other, so as to improve their sequencing skills together. In these ways, teachers can stimulate learners' intrinsic learning motivation, cultivate their independent learning awareness and ability, and make them make continuous progress in continuation writing.

5. Conclusion

This paper proposes the Input-Output Loop Model as a theoretical bridge between Krashen and Swain's historically polarized theories. By framing continuation writing as a dynamic process of input deconstruction, forced output, and self-regulated feedback, the model demonstrates how comprehension and production synergize to drive interlanguage development. Pedagogically, curriculum design based on the input - output cycle model, which shifts from linear to cyclic, can better meet students' learning needs. Teachers, as mediators of cognitive coordination, play an important role in guiding students in input processing, providing feedback and guidance, and facilitating students' self and mutual assessment. At the same time, fostering learners' autonomy so that they can actively plan their learning, provide self-feedback and make adjustments can help improve learning outcomes.

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