

REVIEW OF LANGUAGE TEACHING THEORIES FOR L1 AND L2 LEARNERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Dr. Sandhya Tiwari,
Professor of English, Dept of H&S,
School of Engineering,
NNRG Integrated Campus, Hyd.

INTRODUCTION

The explosion of approaches and modules is a prominent characteristic of contemporary English as Second Language and English as Foreign Language teaching. It symbolizes the strength and scope of the profession. Theory is an essential ingredient in practice that guides the way in which language practitioners opine and approach Teaching Learning process. Theory helps to predict, explain and assess situations and possibilities, and provides a rationale to react and intervene language acquisition process. It aids in identifying the feasible approaches have been introduced, experimented and understood. Methods are the specific techniques and approaches that are adopted to implement to accomplish tasks and reach specific goals. Theories often inform of the type of method that is most appropriate for use.

It is important that the learners and teachers acknowledge and understand their theoretical framework, rather than just practice from assumptions and beliefs that are guided by their personal or professional experiences and not necessarily from established and researched theories. In certain situations ELT exponents, will put the learners into uncertainty and risk by practicing from assumptions and beliefs versus established theories of the profession.

There are various theories with regard to second or foreign language acquisition. This multiplicity and/or plurality of theories is owing to the fact that research in second language acquisition is closely connected to other disciplines like linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, neuroscience, etc. Research conducted in the process of these theories is helpful as it throws light on the various dimensions and principles influencing the language learning process.

HUMAN BRAIN AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Swedish scientists discovered that learning a foreign language can increase the size of brain when they used brain scans to monitor what happens when someone learns a second language. This study is part of a growing body of research using brain imaging technologies to better understand the cognitive benefits of language learning. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and electrophysiology, among others, these days can identify not only whether one needs spine surgery, knee surgery or that there have irregularities with heartbeat, but they also expose how brains responds upon hearing, understanding and producing a second language.

Recent brain-based research provided the good news that people who speak more than one language fluently have better memories and are more cognitively creative and mentally flexible than monolinguals. Canadian studies suggest that Alzheimer's disease and the onset of dementia are diagnosed later for bilinguals than for monolinguals.

BEHAVIOURISM AND LEARNING

Behaviourism is a worldview that assumes a learner to be passive, responding only to stimuli, in the process of learning. Ivan Pavlov, in 1927, started his language teaching experimentation with learning through “classical conditioning.”

Pavlov used the dog’s response to stimuli. Initially the dog only salivated when it was eating. Later Pavlov noticed the dog salivated when he carried the food into the room. He became curious as to why this change had taken place. He thought there were both learned and unlearned components to the dog's behavior. He began experimenting with different stimuli, and if he rang a bell immediately before giving food to the dog, eventually the dog would salivate merely in response to the sound of the bell. He generated terminology to describe his observations. An unconditioned stimulus such as food, generates an instinctual reflexive, unlearned behavior, such as salivation when eating. The salivation was called an unconditioned response because it was not learned. The bell, formerly a neutral sound to the dog, became a conditioned learned stimulus and the salivation a conditioned response. Pavlov also found that the shorter the time between the stimulus and the response, the more quickly a conditioned response could be developed. Ringing the bell immediately before giving food to the dog was more effective than ringing it some longer period of time before feeding. He referred to the time between stimulus and response as contiguity of the stimulus. Other concepts developed by Pavlov were generalization, discrimination, and extinction. Pavlov described all learning in terms of classical conditioning. Later researchers disagreed with this position and demonstrated other modes of learning. We now know that we learn in many ways. Classical conditioning fails to acknowledge the active nature of an organism and its effect on the environment and other organisms in the environment.

SKINNER’S TOTAL OPERANT CONDITIONING

B.F. Skinner is perhaps the predominant figure in behavioural theory of language teaching. He was an experimental psychologist at Harvard who has developed behaviourism as a position in learning. B.F. Skinner, the founder of the notion of Operant Conditioning, nevertheless was hesitant to use the ‘theory’.

Skinner emphasized the perceivable behaviour in the study of humans, hence the term “behaviourism.” He rejected any attempt at reflection or use of hypothetical procedures or structures to account for learning. He preferred, in their place, the impact of a behaviour to explain why the behaviour continues or fades. He believed that behaviour that is followed by reinforcement (positive or negative) has an increased probability of reoccurrence. Behaviour followed by elimination or punishment has a decreased probability of re-occurrence.

In response (or reaction) to the discipline of psychoanalysis and the work of people like Freud, Skinner contemplated that the best way to evolve the field of psychology was through the application of the scientific method based on observable experiments and not assumptions or hypothesis. He asserted human beings the ideal way to learn was through direct observation using our senses. Theoretical musings were meaningless, according to him. He conducted experiments, observed, and recorded the results.

According to Skinner, learning implied by a change in behaviour, requires a teacher to first determine what behavioural change is desirable, then influence the consequences to alter the probability of the behaviour recurring. Through proper use of shaping, the teacher can promote the development of new behaviours. In concept, this is quite simple. In practice, it is a bit more

difficult, but quite within grasp, as research and experience with programmed instruction and behaviour modification show.

- Primary reinforcers (rewards) of those things like food and water and air they don't have to be learned in order to work as a reinforcer.
- Secondary reinforcers or things like praise and money that have to be learned through being paired with primary reinforcers before they have reinforcing value.

Skinner's ideas about instruction have been very influential on education and its impact will continue to be felt.

1. Receiving positive reinforcement
Behaviour is followed by the presentation of a positive stimulus, thus the behavior increases.
Example- Giving students a gold star for completing work on time.
2. Receiving negative reinforcement
Behaviour is followed by the removal of an unpleasant stimulus, thus the behavior increases.
Example- Putting on sunglasses to remove the glare of the sun; allowing students to quit working problems that don't interest them if they follow classroom rules about arriving on time
3. Receiving unpleasant stimulus/punishment
Behaviour is followed by the presentation of an unpleasant stimulus, thus the behaviour diminishes at least temporarily.
Example- Spanking a child who misbehaves; assigning additional homework problems to a student who is disruptive.
4. Withholding a pleasant stimulus
Behaviour is followed by the withholding or removal of a positive stimulus, thus the behaviour decreases or gets eliminated.
Example- Not allowing a student to go out on the playground when he has not completed his work as scheduled

UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR THEORY

The development of universal grammar theory was a critical period. This theory is originally based on first language acquisition. It is closely related to Cognitive psychology principles. It has marked/unmarked features in languages. Chomsky's theory of universal grammar, how it influences language development, and why babies might understand more than we think.

i. Explanation of Universal Grammar Theory

The Universal Grammar theory claims that the speaker's knowledge of a language such as English consists of several such general principles and of the appropriate parameter settings for that language. This theory is not centrally concerned with conventional "rules"; it does not deal with the "passive", or "relative clauses", or any particular construction as such; instead rules are seen as the interaction of various principles and settings for parameters; the English passive reflects the combined effects of principles of syntactic movement, of phrase structure, and of case, each of which also applies to other areas of the grammar.

The model of acquisition is essentially straightforward. As the principles of UG are built-in to the mind, they do not have to be learnt; the learner automatically applies them to whatever

language he or she encounters. It does not matter whether the learner is faced with Japanese or English; the same principles of phrase structure apply.

A baby can tell the difference between the words ‘mom’ and ‘mat’, without actually knowing what the two words mean. The idea that explains this is known as Universal Grammar Theory. Universal grammar theory states that all children are born with an innate ability to acquire, develop, and understand language. If we look at grammar as the laws of language, we could say that all humans are born with an understanding of these laws. While different languages may have different kinds of grammar, humans have a natural predilection to learn and use them.

The realization that very young children innately understand aspects of language has shattered the long-held belief that the mind starts as a blank slate. Behavioural psychologists had assumed that grammar and language were learned solely by listening to it being spoken. Now, the common belief is that language has an inherent genetic component. The human brain is hardwired to develop grammatical language, even without being exposed to it as a baby.

The man credited with this revolution is MIT linguistics professor Noam Chomsky.

ii. Noam Chomsky

Noam Chomsky has made distinguished achievements in many fields including linguistics, philosophy, intellectual history and international politics, etc. He is a fellow in several societies including linguistics, politics, psychology, arts and sciences. He has awarded honorary degrees from tens of universities from Cambridge University to Harvard University. However, he is best known for his contribution in linguistics. During the years 1951 to 1955, Chomsky was a Junior Fellow of the Harvard University Society of Fellows. He, while a Junior Fellow, completed his doctoral dissertation entitled, *Transformational Analysis*. The major theoretical viewpoints of the dissertation appeared in the monograph *Syntactic Structure*, which was published in 1957. This formed part of a more extensive work, *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory*, circulated in mimeograph in 1955 and published in 1975.

The reason why Chomsky invented new theory for structuralism is that he found there are many limitations in the classification of language structure according to distribution and arrangement. So he started to punch the prevailing structuralist descriptive linguistics. Due to this academic practice, Chomsky established the world-famous Transformational-generative (TG) grammar step by step. In 1957, he published his syntactic structures, which marked the beginning of the Chomskyan Revolution. Chomsky developed the theory in the 1950s and 60s before there was scientific equipment, such as the MRI, to show brain activity.

Chomsky believed grammar must be a universal constant in humans because of something he dubbed the poverty of stimulus. This aspect of universal grammar argues that it is not possible that children are exposed to enough of their native language to learn it in a purely behavioral context. Keep in mind that this doesn't mean exposure to one's native language isn't necessary, just that it can't account for the entirety of learning a language. The proponents and promoters of this theory believed that core grammar is true for all languages; peripheral grammar is unique. According to this theory the thrust should be interest in competence, but not performance.

GESTALT LEARNING THEORY

Gestalt became one of the main theories of learning. The three main Gestalt theorists- Wertheimer, Kohler, and Koffka- were all Germans. They received their training and did their early work in Germany, but settled US. The term “Gestalt” was coined by Graf Christian Von Ehrenfels. His ideas influenced the trio of theorists.

Gestalt was a holistic approach and rejected the mechanistic perspectives of the stimulus - response models. Numerous new concepts and approaches emerged from this different philosophical perspective. The Gestalt theory proposes that learning consists of the grasping of a structural whole and not just a mechanistic response to a stimulus. A “Gestalt” is an integrated system with its parts entangled. Trace Theory - This proposes a mechanism for learning in which neurological changes occur as connections are made in the brain. These changes, called traces, represent links between thoughts, ideas, concepts, images, etc. Repetition and uniqueness reinforce a trace. Thus, learning is the creation of traces. Traces group together to form maps. Instructional methods relating to repetition and to making items to be learned somehow distinctive to make learning (trace formation) quicker and more lasting.

i. Language Teaching Approaches

Many theories about the learning - teaching process of languages have been proposed. These theories, usually influenced by improvements in the disciplines of linguistics and psychology, have encouraged many approaches to the teaching of second and foreign languages. The study of these theories and how they influence language teaching methodology today is called applied linguistics.

In language teaching, a distinction is usually made between mother tongue, second language, and foreign language.

- A mother tongue is the first language one acquires as a child.
- When migrants travel to a new country and learn the language of their respective adopted country, they are learning a second language.
- When Hindi-speaking students in USA learn French or German in school, they are learning a foreign language.

The acronyms ESL and EFL stand for the learning of English as a Second and as a Foreign Language.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting that the three main categories into which learning theories falls, namely – behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist theories, are impressive in the kind of new learning they brought in the domain of language learning. Although the process of learning is generally complex it is not entirely unpredictable, and its genuine importance to human culture and the advancement of technology and life makes it a most worthy subject of study. This pursuit has been approached from a variety of perspectives. From these various approaches to the study of learning have emerged a great many theories attempting to explain how learning occurs. And yet, from among all these, there does not seem to be even one that is both broad enough to account for all types of learning, and yet specific enough to be maximally useful in practical application. Perhaps this dichotomy is the reason for the apparent gap between existing theories of learning and the practice of instructional design. In addition to these main theories, there are other theories that address how people learn. In the present study, the need for a principle-based approach to learning theory has been articulated. More than thirty five prominent theories of learning from

the behavioral, cognitive, constructive, human, and social traditions were subjected to a textual review and constant comparative analysis in search of common themes that represent *universal* and *fundamental* principles of learning. These are listed below after a list of general resources addressing all major theories for teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- Chomsky, N. 1957. *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kelly, L.G. 1969. *25 Centuries of Language Teaching*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- Schank, R.C. (1975). *Conceptual Information Processing*. New York: Elsevier.
- Schank, R.C. (1991). *Tell Me a Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Schank, R.C. & Abelson, R. (1977). *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Assoc.
- Schank, R.C. & Cleary, C. (1995). *Engines for education*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Assoc.
- Skinner, B. F. 1957. *Verbal Behaviour*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Stern, H.H. 1983. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stevik, E.W. 1976. *Memory, Meaning and Method: Some Psychological Perspectives on Language Learning*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Further reading

- Nobel e-Museum. "*Ivan Pavlov - Biography*". (Last updated June 27, 2003)
<http://www.nobel.se/medicine/laureates/1904/pavlov-bio.html> (October 6, 2003).
- PBS: A Science Odyssey. "*People and Discoveries*". (1998)
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/bhpavl.html> (October 6, 2003).
- University of Texas. "*Edward L. Thorndike*". <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~tonya/309m/class/paper4/browser/elt.htm> (October 6, 2003).
- A2zpsychology dot com. "*Great Psychologists*". http://www.a2zpsychology.com/greatpsychologists/great_psychologists.htm (October 6, 2003).
- C. George Boeree. "*Personality Theories*". (1998)
<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/skinner.html> (October 6, 2003).
- West Virginia University. "*Classical Conditioning*". (Updated September 15, 1996).
<http://www.as.wvu.edu/~sbb/comm221/chapters/pavlov.htm> (October 6, 2003).