



A Probe into Classroom Teaching and Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Due to the popularization of foreign language study, more and more people from education filed further enhance their exploration and researches in how to apply second acquisition theories into classroom teaching. This paper probes into the orientation, research objects, age, language environment and classroom activities of second language acquisition.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, Classroom teaching

1. Second language acquisition researches

1.1 Second language acquisition researches orientation

Second language acquisition researchers mainly explore how human beings, after having mastered their mother tongues, acquire the second language. The second language acquisition theories systematically do research the nature and acquisition process of second language acquisition. Second language acquisition researches began at the end of 1960s or at the beginning of 1970s in the west. Originally, second language acquisition was a branch of applied linguistics and mainly aimed to provide helps for language teaching. However, with the emergence of interlanguage hypothesis, second language acquisition broke away from applied linguistics and transformational generative linguistics and became an independent discipline.

1.2 Research objectives

Second language acquisition researches could be divided into theoretical second language acquisition researches and applied second language acquisition. The former one mainly aims at establishing second language acquisition theories, such as universal grammar theory (Chomsky, 1965), monitor theory (Krashen, 1982), acculturation mode (Schumann), accommodation theory (Giles, 1982), functional theory (Givon, 1985), variable competent modal (Ellis & Widdowson, 1984). The researchers do researches on the psychological process, cognitive process and language process of second language acquisition from sociology, psychology and linguistics. To put it in detail, researches analyze how learners, after having mastered their mother languages, learn another new language system, what the learners have learned and have not learned, why most of the learners could not achieve their mother language level in their second languages, the influence of mother languages on second languages, and the process the learners apply second languages. The latter does researches on how to apply second language acquisition research outcomes to improve second or foreign language teaching, the compiling of teaching materials and teaching methods, how to write teaching methods, how to design classroom activities, how to improve teaching effect in classroom environment, the impact of classroom language teaching on language acquisition as well as the individual differences of second language learners.

1.3 The classifications of second language acquisition theories

With the emergence of second language acquisition researches worldwide, second language acquisition theories came into birth and developed rapidly in the passed more than 40 years. There are a lot of second language acquisition theories, which hold different point of views. Each theory and point of view brings forth some characteristics and rules of second language acquisition from different perspectives. Ellis (1985) summarized seven second language acquisition theories or modes, which are acculturation mode, accommodation theory, discourse theory, monitor theory, variable competence mode, acquisition theory, creative conformation theory, and universal hypothesis and neurofunctional theory. Linghtbown (1993) summarized four theories, which are behaviorist theory, acquisition theory, and creative conformation theory and interactionist view of language acquisition. Brown (1994) summarized three theories, which are the input theory of Krashen, notice-disposal mode of Mclanghlin and the analysis-automation mode of Bialystok. Richards and Rodgers (1986) put forward two theories. Process oriented theories emphasize the psychological process the second language learners must experience. Condition oriented theories emphasize the teaching skills and classroom conditions that activate the psychological process of second language learners. We classify second language acquisition theories into nurture second language acquisition theories and nature second language theories. The second language theories based on nurture include zone of proximal development of Vygotsky, Skinner's verbal behavior, Piaget's view

of language acquisition, the competition model, and cognitive theory: language acquisition view, discourse theory, discourse theory, the acculturation model, accommodation theory, the variable competence, the inter-actionist view of language acquisition, and the connectionist model. Second language acquisition theories based on nature include neurofunctional theory, the universal grammar theory, Fodor's modular approach and the monitor model.

1.4 Second language acquisition researches in China

In China, second language researches started late and just drew people's attention at the beginning of 1980s. Currently, the researches on this discipline in China should master the main body feature of contents in second language acquisition researched and emphasize multi-discipline principle to build the content system of second language acquisition researches. We also need to follow the principle of combining localization and application and continue to introduce, analyze, criticize and re-construct second language acquisition research theories and hypothesis aboard and make them for our use. We need to show the Chinese features of second language acquisition researches, conduct description of English pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, pragmatic features of Chinese English learners at various learning stage, explain the external influential factors of second language acquisition, such as social environment, foreign language education policies, foreign language study resources, classroom teaching, explore the inner systematical problems of second language acquisition, such as the transfer of mother language, psychology and brain system, do researches on individual differences, such as the cognitive styles, attitudes, motivations and ages of learners and the systems that generate such differences, and apply the research outcomes into the entire teaching process of foreign language teaching field, such as policy making, outline design, capacity development and skill cultivation.

2. Second language acquisition and foreign language learning

2.1 The differences and sameness of first language and second language acquisition

The first language acquisition and the second language acquisition are the same in psychological language system. However, the detailed learning strategies for the two acquisitions are different. The first language acquisition is the inborn ability of a person while the second language acquisition is not. The common points of the first language acquisition and the second language acquisition lie in that acquirers must have the conditions and abilities to acquire a language and are in language acquisition environment. The acquirers must follow certain pragmatics and culture rules to acquire pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The differences of the two are as stated in the following. Firstly, it is the differences of acquirers. The mother language knowledge of an acquirer will certainly exert positive or negative influence on the acquisition of the second language. Mother language acquisition occurs in a person's childhood while usually the learners of the second language are beyond childhood or even at adulthood. Secondly, it is the differences in acquisition environment and styles. More often, mother language acquires accept large amount of language inputs under natural environment. What is more, classroom environment which is used to improve writing ability is also excellent. Second language acquirers are not the same in this respect. They learn the second language out of target language countries or areas in non natural classroom. The acquisitions styles are of two are also different. Mother language acquisition acquires oral language first and then acquires written language. The second language acquisition usually acquires oral language and written language at the same time, which makes it harder. In addition, emotional state and learn motivation of the two are different too. A person acquires his or her mother language in order to meet their basic needs to survive and there is no learn motivation problem. However, the emotional state of the second language acquirers are influenced by various elements and are different from person to person.

2.2 Second language acquisition researches and age

In recent years, the emphasis of foreign language teaching field transfers from the object of teaching to its subject. To put it in other way, the emphasis transfers from the researches on teaching methods to the researches on learners' individual differences. Researches on individual differences usually include age, language potentials, cognitive styles, learning strategies, and emotional factor, of which age is the important factor that influences the effect of second language acquisition. For the age factor in foreign language teaching, Professor Gui Shichun (1992) put forward two opinions. The first one is that learners who have suitable learning environment (such as bilingual system or foreign teachers) and start learning foreign language earlier may possibly, seeing from a long term angle, have advantages over those who start learning late. The second one is that under suitable learning environment, in most of the aspect, the youth and the adults could learn foreign language as well as children or even are better in learning efficiency.

2.3 Second language acquisition and second language learning

Acquisition refers to that learners subconsciously acquire a language through large amount of contacts and usage of target language. During this process, what learners care are the meanings of language but not language form. Learning refers to learn to consciously learn and do research on a language in order to master the language. During this process, language form is the core of learning. Acquisition includes conscious learning. Conscious learning may help unconsciously learn some unexpected knowledge. Therefore, it is hard to define whether it is conscious or unconscious or whether it is formal or informal teaching environment. Second language acquisition, to its true meanings, should

contain two basic concepts, conscious learning and unconscious acquisition. Therefore, second language acquisition researchers should not only cover informal learning environment, but also should place its emphasis on formal learning environment, classroom teaching. For any learners, these two processes are necessary and are usually interlaced.

3. Classroom teaching and second language acquisition

3.1 The environment of second language acquisition

If having opportunities, most of learners could develop their second language abilities through learning and acquisition. As for which way is more importance, we need to know their learning environment. For example, our students have few accesses to second language environment. Hence, we could only depend on conscious classroom study to improve English. Because we have a Chinese environment around us, we could have many chances to acquire oral Chinese and its application. However, the acquisition of the first language is helpful for second language learning.

As soon as an infants are born, they start to “do research” on language because they have the inborn and inherent ability to acquire language. If language universal phenomenon do exist and could be recognized, then it seems that the universal elements in the second language should be taught to learners first and let them practice them. Teachers should not just provide mechanical classroom practice chances to learners. If the second language learning has some same features as mother language acquisition, then the language input the learners get and the practices should enable them to establish and examine the hypotheses on how the language is applied in actual life. Teachers should:

3.1.1 From the beginning of teaching, teachers should use second language as much as possible to organize activities or conduct social interactions.

3.1.2 When starting to ask students to generate second language, teachers should ask students to discuss events of “that time and that place”. There are many relevant discussion topics in the classroom, such as the learners’ appearance, family, clothing and hobbies or articles in the classroom including their shapes, sizes, colors and materials.

3.1.3 Design some language activities and help students clearly see the relationship between forms and meanings. Some activities require students to use language to do things so as to ensure that learners understand what they have heard or read and some activities require students to make use of oral language to achieve certain goals.

If the language learning environment is for learners to learn English as foreign language, under most of situations, there are few opportunities to acquire language through mutual actions and language learning will base on classroom teaching. At the class, how much time should be used to conduct formal learning and mechanical learning of second language structure depends on the aim of language learning. In China, learners usually are trapped in dealing with large amount of words. Therefore, it is necessary to formally teach and to control second language structures. However, it is not sufficient enough to just conduct two activities to put these structures into long term memory. It is necessary to provide learners with the opportunities at the very beginning so that they could practice what they have learned in acceptable and generative environment. What is more, we need to teach according to students’ personalities. Teachers should know which student in the class is introverted or extroverted. Introverted students need encouraging and easy classroom atmosphere. For extroverted students, we need to require that they should not only speak fluently but also need to use language accurately.

3.2 Classroom activities

Classroom teaching is the main channel to realize making education. If classroom teaching changes from simple knowledge teaching to multi-angle intelligent development, it will be the key and development direction of foreign language making education. In recent foreign language classroom teaching practices, we use to teach teaching materials in exact manner, to express clearly the teaching materials, to teach learning methods and to speak teaching procedures to optimize classroom teaching and have achieved good teaching effect.

3.2.1 To teach teaching materials in exact manner and to promote the unification of knowledge, feeling, awareness and behavior

English is a discipline that is of strong practice and has its language and teaching rules. To teach teaching materials in exact manner means that teachers need to analyze carefully the teaching materials and tell the position and functions of each class in the entire discipline knowledge system. When teaching, teachers should make clear the teaching aims, requirements, and difficulties, master the logic structure of knowledge, analyze the relationship among the key knowledge, difficulties and basic knowledge of the teaching contents, and follow the cognitive learning rules “from easy to difficult, from shallow to deep, from emotional and rational, and from the known to unknown”. Only by this way, could the teachers give prominence to the most basic and the easiest contents of the entire knowledge system and put the “exactness” on the specific cognitive aims, ability aims, and thoughts education aims. Let us take the Unit Four of the current new edition English book one of junior high school as an example. This unit aims to teach the expression of numbers in English and their use in life. After doing analysis, the contents of this unit will be used in Unit 6, Unit 9,

Unit 12, Unit 12 of book one as well as the numeric and multiple in book 2 and 3, which indicates that the contents of this unit are the key and basic part for students to master the number knowledge in junior high school. The existing cognitive level of students is just at the translation of numerals, one, two and three. Therefore, if finding the starting point of the teaching material contents and the current cognitive structure of students, we could define that the aims of this class are: firstly, cognitive aim, which is to master the spelling and usage; secondly, the ability aim, which is to show students the knowledge by way of real objects, real scenes and pictures so that students could actively participate in learning activities and students' abilities in comprehending, analyzing, and deducting knowledge and in observation, memory and imagination are developed; thirdly, thought education aim, which requires to cultivate students to have strong communication awareness and mutual help behaviors through group activities, to cultivate students' strong participation awareness through group activities, to cultivate students' cooperation spirit and dedication spirit through role playing and games. By this way, students could experience the normal mood of failure and success, accumulate intelligence, and overcome difficulties so as to promote the unification of their knowledge, feeling, awareness and behavior.

To teach exactly the teaching materials, teachers need to comprehensively and appropriately master the teaching aims of each class. Not only should there be requirements on knowledge, but also requirements on ability. Not only should there be requirements on intelligence education, but also requirements on thought education according to teaching contents. The teaching should not only comply with teaching outlines, but also comply with the actual conditions of students so that teachers could teach in accordance of students' aptitude. Besides, teachers need to, according to the inner relations among knowledge, find the connecting point and growth point of new and old knowledge, create the best problem scenarios, make full use of students' existing knowledge, and conduct breakthrough teaching activities based on students' cognitive level so as to improve classroom teaching's effect.

3.2.2 To express clearly the teaching methods and to promote development of students' thinking ability

The understanding and mastering of any knowledge is realized through thinking. Hence, to master the correct thinking ways and methods is the key to promote students' intelligence skills. The formation of correct thinking abilities of students is commonly influenced by teachers' teaching methods. Teachers should express clearly their teaching methods and optimize teaching methods. In each class, the teaching is the comprehensive application of multi-teaching methods. No matter which teaching method the teachers mainly use or which teaching method is applied, all should be based on teaching materials and the actual situations of students as well as the special conditions of each teacher. Generally speaking, in classroom teaching, teachers should choose the teacher methods that conduce to activating students' enthusiasm in cognitive activities as well as students' development ability. Teachers should attach emphasis on activating students' learning motivation, follow cognitive rules, enlighten students to reason, take into consideration of individuals as well as the general and teach students in accordance of their aptitude.

3.2.3 To teach learning methods and to promote students' ability in self-teaching and self-learning

The key part of making education is to teach students the learning methods and strategies and is the nature leaping process for learners from learning to master to mastering learning. Cognitive learning theories also emphasize that learning has aim, schedule and strategies. Teachers, while considering how to teach students, should also consider how to instruct students to learn so that they could not only master the knowledge but also the learning methods. Foreign language is not only a simple teaching of language knowledge. Actually, it is a subtle cross-cultural communication process through language learning. Teachers should aim at teaching students to apply the existing knowledge and experience to resolve English language problems, to learn to think and to learn to learn. For example, in listening teaching, teachers should get clear what to listen, the general meaning, the detailed information, or the language expression. Teachers should make clear the aims and the focus. Also, teachers should tell students how to judge and analyze the language materials, how to distribute their attention, and whether to ignore contents that are irrelevant to the current tasks. Besides getting students to understand what they have listened, such classroom teaching process aims to teach students the methods and skills of listening.

3.2.4 To speak clearly the teaching procedures and improve classroom teaching efficiency

The acquisition of new knowledge is a positive acceptance process, is the assimilation process of new and old knowledge, and is the process that the potential meanings of new knowledge are realized. Chinese students start to learn English after they have mastered mother language to certain level. To realize the unifying of students' existing knowledge and experience with the newly learned knowledge structure, teachers must have clear teaching thoughts and layering class structure for each class so that teachers could make the new language knowledge clearly shown through teaching procedures. In classroom teaching, teachers exactly master teaching aims, optimize teaching methods, correctly mentor students' learning methods, clearly conduct teaching procedures, and promote students to rapidly students' cognition level on their learning activities and methods. Students' ability in self-observation, self-monitor and self-evaluation are also improved so as to reach the basic aims of foreign language making education.

4. Summary

Based on the features of China's foreign language learners, we should take into consideration of the actual situation of China's foreign language teaching, and scientifically explore the language process, psychology process, education process, learning rules of learners in learning foreign languages so as to find out the most appropriate foreign language teaching mode and improve Chinese students' foreign language learning efficiency. Only under the direction of such thoughts and concepts, could we let our research study truly exert its functions. By this way, China's foreign language teaching is based on scientific basis of second language acquisition researches so that we could resolve as soon as possible the difficulties Chinese foreign language learners are confronted with.

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