

高校论丛

李英林题



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A Probe into the Integration of Culture and Language in the EFL Classroom

山东烟台大学 韩晓玲

摘 要:自 20 世纪中期以来,越来越多的外语教学人士认识到了文化在外语习得(foreign language acquisition)中所起的重要作用。不少外语界专家也做了很多将文化与外语教学相结合的尝试,但收效甚微。本文作者认为,只有深刻了解文化与语言之间的内在关系,才有望找到将文化与外语教学有机结合的途径。头痛医头,脚痛医脚,不能从根本上解决问题。鉴于此,本文作者将在本文中详细、系统地论述有关外语习得方面的理论和文化的本质;探讨文化与外语习得的内在关系,并提出如何将文化与外语教学有机结合之我见,以与同行切磋。

ESL/ELF Acquisition and Learning Theories

As is the case with any scientific theory, the language acquisition theory consists of a variety of hypotheses or generalizations. In this paper, four theories in ESL/EFL acquisition and learning will be described: input hypothesis, expectancy hypothesis, acculturation hypothesis, and schema theory.

The Input Hypothesis

韩晓玲:1982年毕业于山东师范大学外语系,1982—1986留校任教,1986调烟台大学外语系,1988—1989赴新加坡进修英语教学法,1994—1996赴美留学获英语语言学及教学法硕士学位,现外语系主任,副教授。

Stephen Krashen (1980) states explicitly an idea that many language teachers and even more theorists had been considering for a long time which he calls "the input hypothesis." This language acquisition theory claims that a necessary condition for one to move from his current language competence (i) to the next level (+1) is that the acquirer be able to understand the input that contains (i + 1) by using not only his current competence but also his knowledge of the world, extra-linguistic information.

Krashen suggests that teachers should find other ways to make the input comprehensible in addition to linguistic alterations. According to him, helpful teachers should make use of the learner's knowledge of the world to help make the input comprehensible.

According to Krashen, the students' background knowledge of the world and extra-linguistic information is of great importance in helping the students to acquire a foreign language. How the EFL teachers can help their students in the EFL classrooms to develop the kind of knowledge of the world and the extra-linguistic information which will facilitate their language acquisition and learning should be the main concern in the field of foreign language education.

The Expectancy Hypothesis

The expectancy hypothesis developed by Patricia A. Richard-Amato (1986) tries to address the question implicit in Krashen's input hypothesis - how is input sometimes converted to intake. The expectancy hypothesis states that the activation of correct expectancies will enhance the progressing of textual structures. Richard-Amato discusses two kinds of expectancies in language learning: (1) event-structures in experience, and (2) the sequences of verbal elements that constitute discourse. In this hypothesis, according to Richard-Amato

to, "event - structures in experience" refers to one's knowledge of the world and one's background knowledge about the message conveyed in the texts. Richard - Amato suggests that one's background knowledge or one's knowledge of the world has developed both kinds of expectancies in the learners of foreign languages. When they are given the input in the target language, both of their expectancies will be activated. If their expectancies go against the message conveyed in the input, misunderstanding will result.

Students who learn a foreign language in their own country are brought up in a totally different culture. The expectancies they have developed are sometimes quite different which are expected by the writers of the target culture of their listeners or readers. The different expectancies will cause misunderstanding when the learners approach a message conveyed in the target language.

The Acculturation Hypothesis

Schumann(1978a) hypothesized that acculturation is the "major casual variable in second language acquisition" (p. 29). The central premise of the acculturation hypothesis is that: "... second language acquisition is just one aspect of the acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the second language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language"(Schumann 1978a, p. 34). According to Schumann, acculturation can be viewed as the most effective means of gaining comprehensible input to motivate second language acquisition. Schumann also points out that acculturation, and hence SLA, is determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the target culture.

Schumann(1978b) also suggests that the early stages of SLA are

characterized by the same processes that are responsible for the formation of pidgin languages. According to him, when social and/or psychological distances are great, the learner fails to progress beyond the early stages, with the result that his language is pidginized.

How can the social and psychological distance between the learner and the target culture be shortened to prevent early pidginization, and hence fossilization, from forming? The writer of this paper suggests that one possible way to do this in a foreign language classroom should be to teach the target culture by providing the learner with adequate, interesting, and comprehensible culture-based input.

The Schema Theory

Traditionally, students were taught to read a text in a word-by-word fashion. However, during the past decade, ESL/EFL reading theory has been influenced greatly by psycholinguistics.

Frank Smith (1973) points out two contributions of psycholinguistics which make the word-by-word interpretation of a reading passage impossible. First, there is a limit to the amount of information that the learners are able to receive, process, and remember. Reading is a very quick process which cannot be carried out word by word. Second, study has proven that in reading, most information is contributed by the readers. That is to say that readers understand what they are reading because they have the background knowledge about the concepts conveyed in the text already stored in their minds.

Recent research indicates that the background knowledge the reader brings into his/her reading tasks is more powerful than this psycholinguistic model suggests. Many researchers point out that when the student reads a passage, he/she brings to the reading task a great amount of information and ideas, attitudes and beliefs. According to

their research, the information and ideas attitudes and beliefs the reader brings to the reading task, together with his/her ability to make linguistic predictions, determine the expectations the reader will develop as he/she reads.

The important role of background knowledge in reading comprehension has been formalized by Bartlett(1932), Rumelhart and Ortony (1977), and Rumelhart(1980) as schema theory. According to schema theory, a text only provides directions for the readers as to how they should construct meaning from their background knowledge. Comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text, and efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. In order to understand the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension, Carrel(1983) has distinguished two kinds of schemata: formal schemata (background knowledge of the formal rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts), and content schemata (background knowledge of the content area of a text). If the students fail to activate an appropriate schemata during their reading, they will fail to understand the reading text. The failure to activate the appropriate schemata may be either because the writer does not provide enough information in the writing or because the reader does not possess the appropriate schemata.

Taking all the theories reviewed above into consideration, one can understand the importance of the role of culture in second language learning and acquisition and see the necessity of helping the ESL/EFL students become more open to the target culture in order to develop the appropriate kind of expectancy and the appropriate kind of schemata by providing them with adequate, interesting, and comprehensible culture

based input.

The Nature of Culture

What is culture? According to the studies done by H. Ned Seelye (1994), historically, the discussion on the definition of culture brought two distinct insights. On the one hand were humanists concerned with the liberating effect of humanity's commendable accomplishments; on the other hand are social scientists concerned with the details of all human learning – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The first contemporary effort to define culture was done by anthropologists. The definitions given by anthropologists are diverse. Two well known anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1954), explained approximately 300 definitions in a study entitled Culture: A Critical Review of Concept and Definitions.

To sum up the definitions given by some well – known researchers, culture may be defined as the ideas, customs, conventions, skills, fine arts, literature, history, law, education, politics, and values that characterize a group of people in a given period of time. From the above definition, one can see that culture runs through every “fiber” with which a society is “woven”, and culture permeates every “cell” with which a society is organized. In other words, culture is like a screen on which every human act is performed. Since language is one of the most important human acts, how can one learn a language without learning the culture?

The Relationship between Language and Culture

According to studies in this field, there is always a great deal of interaction between language and culture. Half a century ago, Kluckhohn (1944) pointed out: “Human culture without language is unthinkable” (P.26). Laird (1953) states language is an agreement among hu-

man beings to communicate their thoughts. For language to be understood it has to be placed in a cultural context. Whorf(1956) explains the relationship between language, thought, and culture by saying:

... And every language is a vast pattern - system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness. (p. 252)

Sapir(1964) says: "... we may think of language as the symbolic guide to culture"(p. 70). According to Goodenough(1964), the relation of language to culture is like the relation of part to whole. Valdes (1986) insists that a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are so intricately interwoven that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. Louise Damen (1987) states: "Language and culture are closely related and interactive. Culture is transmitted in great part through language; cultural patterns in turn are reflected in language" (p. 89).

Among the many researchers who study the relationship between language and culture, only a few have been mentioned.

Conclusion

The relationship between language and culture is such that ESL/EFL teachers should integrate language and culture in their classes. Crawford - Lange (1984) indicates that foreign language teachers should set the development of a cultural syllabus as a professional priority. He suggests that culture should assume a prime role in foreign language curricula and that culture should determine the language skills to be developed. Unfortunately, most foreign language teachers, though