



大学外语系列丛书
DAXUE WAIYU XILIE CONGSHU

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外语学习与教学 双语教程（学习篇）



HEUP 哈尔滨工程大学出版社
Harbin Engineering University Press

外语学习与教学双语教程(学习篇)

**BILINGUAL COURSE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE
LEARNING AND TEACHING(LEARNING)**

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哈尔滨工程大学出版社

内 容 简 介

语言教学所涉及的领域可以概括为三个领域,即语言学习者和学习(怎样学)、语言与文化(学什么)、教师与教学(怎样教)。多年来,对这三个领域来说,人们更着重研究语言本身和教学方法,普遍认为只要把语言研究清楚了,再找到一种好的教学方法,人们都能学会、学好一门外语。但结果却并不像我们所期望的那样,相同的教师,相同的教材,相同的教学方法,却总是有的学生学得好,有的学生学不好,这就使我们的外语教学研究者开始关注外语学习者和外语学习,研究学习者个体之间的差异,研究产生这种差异的各种因素。本教材主要针对外语专业的本科生和中小学英语教师,使他们能够了解语言学习和教学的理论和原则,掌握语言学习的规律,以便更好地指导语言学习和语言教学。

本书可作为高等院校外语专业的本科生、研究生的教材,对于大学外语教师、外语语言学习者及从事外语研究的专家也可作参考。

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

外语学习与教学双语教程. 学习篇/杨雪主编. —哈尔滨:
哈尔滨工程大学出版社, 2011. 12
ISBN 978 - 7 - 5661 - 0304 - 8

I. ①外… II. ①杨… III. ①外语教学 - 高等学校 -
教材 IV. ①H09

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2012)第 005296 号

出版发行 哈尔滨工程大学出版社
社 址 哈尔滨市南岗区东大直街 124 号
邮政编码 150001
发行电话 0451 - 82519328
传 真 0451 - 82519699
经 销 新华书店
印 刷 黑龙江省教育厅印刷厂
开 本 787mm × 1 092mm 1/16
印 张 14.75
字 数 340 千字
版 次 2011 年 12 月第 1 版
印 次 2011 年 12 月第 1 次印刷
定 价 28.50 元
<http://press.hrbeu.edu.cn>
E-mail: heupress@hrbeu.edu.cn

前 言

PREFACE

21 世纪是信息时代,国际间政治对话和贸易往来、世界范围资源与教育共享等都以英语为主要媒介,学习一门外语,特别是英语,已成为我们国家对 21 世纪公民的基本要求之一。我国现有正规在校学习英语的学生六千多万,加上非正规学校以及社会力量办学和自学英语的人数,总人数超过一个亿。在中国这样一个单一语言的环境中,有如此多的人在学习英语,他们具有怎样的学习目的和动机,采用怎样的学习策略和方法,影响他们学习的关键因素都有哪些都是需要我们认真研究和思考的问题。目前有许多有关语言学习和语言教学的书籍,但这些书籍内容较难,更适合外语专业研究生及从事外语研究的专家阅读。

本书主要针对外语专业的本科生和中小学英语教师,使他们能够了解语言学习与教学的理论和原则,掌握语言学习的规律,以便更好地指导语言学习和语言教学,也可供外语各语种的大学教师及外语语言学习者参考使用。考虑到本书的使用对象,本书的第一个特色是采用双语形式,既可更好地适应本科生学习的需要,也能满足更多读者的需要。英语部分可使读者熟悉英语的用词和文体,以便将来进一步学习和科研时,顺利进入阅读原著的阶段;中文部分能帮助读者更好地理解所阅读的材料和理论。本书的第二大特色是学习与教学相结合。当今的外语教学已经从研究如何教到研究如何学,未来的外语教师最主要的任务是导学、助学,离开了学的一面,很难界定什么是教。教的一方对语言学习过程、特点和规律把握得越好,教学上导向就会越清楚,方法也会越贴切、越有成效。本系列从学习篇和教学篇两个方面入手,本册为学习篇。杨雪负责英文部分第 1 章至第 4 章(约 110 千字);张丽娜负责英文部分第 5 章至第 7 章(约 60 千字);孔志敏负责英文部分第 8 章至第 10 章(约 60 千字);吴雪松负责中文部分(约 110 千字)。

本书为 2010 年黑龙江省哲学社会科学项目的研究成果(项目编号:10E024),由于编者时间和精力受到制约,加之理论水平、专业素质的提高永无止境,编写中的不当之处恳请读者批评指正。

编者

2011 年 6 月



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Unit 1 Language and Language Learning

This unit focuses on:

- * The status of learning English as a foreign language in China
- * Views on language
- * Language learning
- * Views on language learning

The status of learning English as a foreign language in China

Learning English in China typically belongs to learning a nonnative language in one's own culture with few immediate and wide-spread opportunities to use the language. The primary task of TEFL is to enable the learners to command the four basic skills of language for use in the widest possible range of different situations. As a result, the general English instruction, which is provided in secondary schools in rural areas, has in most cases proven to be an inadequate preparation for learners who are required to make use of the language when they enter higher education. Even of the English courses provided in some urban primary schools, most emphasis is still squarely on isolated grammatical structures and lexical items. Learners who become accustomed to this learning style often find that all the learning environments in universities are quite different, and that they are left to fend for themselves when the language learning rapidly becomes more difficult. It is assumed that the difficulties learners encounter arise not so much from a defective knowledge of the system of English, but from an unfamiliarity with appropriate use of English.

By investigating some English learners in our country, we often cannot help but regard the average product of English learning as being sadly and grossly deficient, and English teaching is in a worse situation. Some learners are even unaware of the importance of appropriateness in communication. It shows that they often neither understand the language they have been learning as spoken by a native speaker in a real life condition, nor make themselves understood in it, nor talk acceptably on subjects relevant to life outside the classroom. This is why some learners think words and expressions are the most difficult to obtain. Besides, as is widely known, the theory advocated by one of the greatest thinkers, Confucius. Instead of practical process of using knowledge, Confucius regards learning as accumulation of knowledge and reading of many books. Thus, it greatly influences the way of English learning and teaching in China. For example, the use of memorization and rote learning is considered to be a basic acquisition technique. People pay insufficient attention to communicative abilities. The teacher is authoritative, and the learners are passive. As a result, the importance of linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammatical rules in



overemphasized by neglecting the significance of how to apply the knowledge in communication. That is to say, learners have only obtained a lot of declarative knowledge, i. e. knowing what, with insufficient procedure knowledge, i. e. knowing how. In foreign language learning, however, both kinds of knowledge are the necessary conditions leading to the success of real-life communication. In the following section, we will come to the main problems in communication, which exist as the consequences of the status of TEFL in China.

Views on language

What is language? To give a concise definition of language has always been difficult for linguists and philologists. Although there has been an enormous amount of research in language in the past century, no authoritative answer has been given to 'What is language?' Rather, people have settled down to talk about views of language, seemingly allowing for or accepting different theories for the moment. Consider the following definitions of language found in dictionaries and introductory textbooks:

- Language is any means, vocal or other, expressing or communicating feeling or thought... a system of conventionalized signs, especially words, or gestures having fixed meanings (Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language 1934: 1390).

- Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language 1961: 1270).

- Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact (Finocchiaro 1964:8).

- Language is a system of communication by sound, operating through the organs of speech and hearing, among members of a given community, and using vocal symbols possessing arbitrary conventional meanings (Pei 1966:141).

- Language is any set or system of linguistic symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another (Random House Dictionary of the English Language 1966: 806).

- Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication (Wardhaugh 1972:3).

- Language is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary of the English Language 1993:1270).

- Language is a system of communication consisting of a set of small parts and a set of rules which decide the ways in which these parts can be combined to produce messages that have meaning (Cambridge International Dictionary of English 1995:795).

Still other common definitions found in introductory textbooks on linguistics include the concepts of (1) the generativity or creativity of language, (2) the presumed primacy of speech over writing, and (3) the universality of language among human beings.



Many of the significant characteristics of language are capsulized in these definitions. Some of the controversies about the nature of language are also illustrated through the limitations that are implied in certain definitions. A consolidation of the definitions of language yields the following composite definition.

- Language is systematic and generative.
- Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.
- Those symbols are primarily vocal, but may also be visual.
- The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.
- Language is used for communication.
- Language operates in a speech community or culture.
- Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.
- Language is acquired by all people in much the same way—language and language learning both have universal characteristics.

These eight statements provide a reasonably concise “twenty-five-words-or-less” definition of language. But the simplicity of the eightfold definition should not be allowed to mask the sophistication of linguistic endeavor underlying each concept.

In the past century, language teaching and learning practice has been influenced by three different views of language, namely, the structural view, the functional view and the interactional view.

Structural view: The structural view of language sees language as a linguistic system made up of various subsystems: the sound system (phonology); the discrete units of meaning produced by sound combinations (morphology); and the system of combining units of meaning for communication (syntax). Each language has a finite number of such structural items. To learn a language means to learn these structural items so as to be able to understand and produce language. When this structural view of language was combined with the stimulus-response principles of behaviouristic psychology, the audiolingual approach to language learning emerged.

Functional view: In the 1960s, British linguists developed a system of categories based on the communicative needs of the learner (Johnson and Marrow, 1981) and proposed a syllabus based on communicative functions. The functional view not only sees language as a linguistic system but also a means for doing things. Most of our day-to-day language use involves functional activities: offering, suggesting, advising, apologizing, etc. Therefore, learners learn a language in order to be able to do things with it. In order to perform functions, learners need to know how to combine the grammatical rules and the vocabulary to express notions that perform the functions. Examples of notions are the concept of present, past & future time, the expressions of certainty and possibility, the roles of agents, instruments within a sentence and special relationships between people and objects.

Interactional view: The interactional view considers language to be a communicative tool, whose main use is to build up and maintain social relations between people. Therefore, learners not only need to know the grammar and vocabulary of the language but as importantly



they need to know the rules for using them in a whole range of communicative contexts.

These three views present an ever wider view of language. The structural view limits knowing a language to knowing its structural rules and vocabulary. The communicative or notional-functional view adds the need to know how to use the rules and vocabulary to do whatever it is one wants to do. The interactional view says that to know how to do what you want to do involves also knowing whether it is appropriate to do, and where, when and how it is appropriate to do it. In order to know this, you have to study the patterns and rules of language above the sentence level to learn how language is used in different speech contexts.

Language learning

Why do people learn foreign language?

According to one estimate, there are about a billion people in the world today learning English as a foreign language. A billion is a thousand million—a phenomenally large number of people! If you add to this the number of individuals who are learning foreign languages other than English—French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese and many others—then you realize just how many people on the planet are engaged in the process of foreign-language learning.

Why the quite phenomenal expenditure of human energy in this direction? Why on earth do people bother to learn foreign languages on such a grand scale? In this chapter we shall consider some of the reasons why they do it, how successful they are at it. A major theme of the chapter will be variety. There are, we shall find many different reasons for learning.

Reasons for learning:

Before we look at other people, try to answer the “Why Question” for yourself and for friends. First consider your own language-learning experiences, and ask yourself what your motives for learning were. Make a list of these. If you were obliged to learn, think what the motives of those who obliged you were. When you have thought about yourself, consider other people you know.

Think finally about the world beyond your immediate environment. Write a list of what you imagine to be the main motives for people world wide learning foreign languages. As you read on, note how many of the reasons on your list are discussed below.

In order to answer the “Why Question”, and to appreciate the variety of answers it may receive, we shall consider five individuals involved in foreign-language learning. They have been chosen to reveal some of the common motivations learners have (Keith Johnson, 2002).

Learner number one is Zhang. He lives in the Sichuan province of mainland China. He has a bachelor's degree from his local university in business study, and he wants to do a master's degree overseas. He has applied to universities in Britain, the United States and Australia, and there is the chance that he may receive some scholarship money. But all the universities require him to take an internationally recognized English test before he is offered a place, and his score on the test must be very high. It is now January, and Zhang's test is in June. He does not enjoy language learning at all, but his situation explains very well why so



very many of his daily waking hours are spent in the tedious business of improving his English.

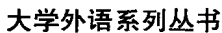
Mike is an Australian, and his reason for learning Spanish could not be more different from Zhang's reason for learning English. Mike has just got married to Carmen, as Spanish girl he met in Sydney where she was among other things following an English-language course—yet more language learning! Mike has never been to Spain, and does not speak Spanish at the moment. But both these things must change. In the summer the two of them plan to visit Carmen's parents in Valencia and neither of her parents speaks English. Hence Mike is at present as intensely engaged in foreign language learning as Zhang is.

Learner number three is an Indian girl whose name is Jasmine. She lives in Chennai, the capital city of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Her native language is Tamil. The foreign language she is learning is another Indian language, though a very different one from Tamil. It is Hindi, considered a national language of India. In India many diverse, mutually unintelligible languages are spoken, and there is the need for one tongue to be spoken by all; the phrase *lingua franca* describes such a language, used as means of communication between speakers of other languages. Jasmine wants to continue living and working in Madras, but the job she has in mind will involve communication with Indians throughout the subcontinent. This is why she is learning Hindi.

Bryn is a Welshman. He lives in Wales, and is learning Welsh as a foreign language. You may find it odd for someone to be learning the language of their home country as a foreign language. But Bryn's situation and aspirations are not that uncommon. His parents have always spoken English at home, and his education has been entirely in English. Now, as a man in his early twenties, he feels the need to speak the language of his roots, to understand his own culture, to help strengthen the distinctiveness of Welsh society which he feels has long been under threat from England and the English. Bryn does not find learning Welsh particular easy, but this does not bother him; he is very well motivated, and can indeed get quite lyrical on the topic—he really does regard Welsh as opening a window onto a new and meaningful culture for him.

Anna Vecsey is a scientist who works for a research institute attached to a university in Budapest, Hungary. She studied English at school, but her English is poor, and she is made constantly aware of her need to improve it. This awareness is particularly strong at the moment because her institute is about to host an international conference. The delegates will come from all over the world, and the language of communication will come from all over the world, and the language of communication will be English. Papers at the conference will be delivered in English, chat over coffee will be in English, and there is unlikely to be any respite even over dinner, where English will be spoken. English, English, English! As a consequence, Anna Vecsey has signed up for a language-improvement course at a local private language school.

These five characters illustrate some of the many reasons why people take time to learn a foreign language in today's world. The reasons are indeed various. Zhang is learning English



in China for study purposes. Mike is busy with Spanish in Australia to integrate himself within his wife's culture, while Bryn in Wales is learning Welsh to strengthen his own cultural identity. Jasmine learns Hindi in India for purposes of intranational communication (that is, with people from within her country), and Anna in Hungary learns English to facilitate international communication (with people from other countries).

It is not in fact difficult to understand the importance of foreign-language learning in today's world. As the planet becomes smaller, and the means for moving round it easier, so it has become more multicultural and multilingual. Not so long ago we used to be able to talk of nation states which could be associated with single languages—in France they spoke French in Germany German, and so on. But it is no longer like that. Take a country like Australia. Clyne (1991) plots the immigration patterns into Australia since the Second World War. In the 1950s came the Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Croats, Slovenians and Ukrainians. Then there were Germans from Eastern Europe, refugees from Greece in 1967, from Hungary following the Soviet intervention of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The list really could be expanded very considerably, still talking about the same period—British, Maltese, Cypriots, Dutch, Germans, Italians, Yugoslavs, Lebanese, Turks, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians. All this means that a stroll down a main street in any major Australian city is likely to be an informal introduction to the languages of the world! You are certainly not going to hear just English, the one language traditionally associated with Australia. The same is true in the United States, another country where a common perception is that just English is spoken. But the United States, like Australia and much of the rest of the world, is not monolingual. Today's world is truly multilingual. In a multilingual world, it is natural to find large numbers of people who speak more than one language. In many countries there are many more than two languages in operation, and it is not difficult to find examples where large numbers of languages are spoken on a daily basis.

What is there to learn?

What exactly is involved in learning a foreign language? What kinds of “knowledge” and “skill” need to be mastered? If you are asked questions like this, your initial responses will probably involve words like “pronunciation”, “vocabulary” and “grammar”. One intended outcome is to make you realize how complex an operation learning a foreign language is. There is indeed an immense amount to be mastered.

Questions like the ones above need to be approached in two stages. Firstly, we will identify what different types of knowledge and skill are involved in using a language: the skills and knowledge that the competent language user possesses. This will involve the areas already mentioned—like pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar—as well as some less obvious ones. The result of this stage of enquiry will be a list of all the levels on which a language can be analyzed: the levels which the discipline of linguistics is concerned with.

But describing these different levels of knowledge and skill will only half-answer our questions. This is because not everything involved in using a language needs to be learned



afresh by the learner. A rather extreme example will clarify this. One of the things that the speakers of nearly all languages do is to produce sounds by pushing air from the lungs, through the vocal cords and up into the mouth. We may legitimately say that this skill is part of what is involved in speaking a foreign language. But the learner has already mastered this skill in relation to L1 learning. It does not have to be either learned or taught. So the second stage of enquiry asks the extent to which mastery of these levels involves new learning.

To develop some feel for the complexities of the “what is involved in learning a foreign language” question, we may add to the extreme example of breathing a more modest and more revealing one. Part of the English grammatical system involves use of ‘articles’: the words the, a and an. We may legitimately say that in order to use English properly, this article system has to be mastered. But this will entail very different amounts of learning for speakers of different languages. For some learners, there will be rather a small amount of learning involved, because their own L1 has a comparable system. So L1 speakers of German, for example, will have relatively few problems with the English articles. But the situation will be dramatically different for the speakers of L1s which do not have a comparable article system, or indeed any article system at all. So for Japanese or Russian speakers the operation involves very much more than learning the words the, a and an. With these learners, the whole issue of what an article is, and what it ‘means’ has to be tackled, and a pause for thought will make you realize what a phenomenally difficult issue this is likely to be. This correctly suggests that the answer to our questions ‘what exactly is involved in learning a foreign language?’ and “what kinds of ‘knowledge’ and ‘skill’ need to be mastered?” are not just complex, but will also differ from learner to learner.

How does one begin to categorize the levels of knowledge and skill involved in language use?

Views on language learning

A language learning theory underlying an approach or method usually answers two questions: (1) What are the psycholinguistic and cognitive processes involved in language learning? (2) What are the conditions that need to be met in order for these learning processes to be activated? Although these two questions have never been satisfactorily answered, a vast amount of research has been done from all aspects. The research can be broadly divided into process-oriented theories and condition-oriented theories. Process-oriented theories are concerned with how the mind organizes new information such as habit formation, induction, making inference, hypothesis testing and generalization. Condition-oriented theories emphasise the nature of the human and physical context in which language learning takes place, such as the number of students, the kind of input learners receive, and the atmosphere. Some researchers attempt to formulate teaching approaches directly from these theories. For example, the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, and the Silent Way are based on one or more dimensions of processes and conditions. At this level, it is too early to formulate a specific approach, because some aspects are still too vague, for example, what



is done in these processes.

Behaviourist theory: The behaviourist theory of language learning was initiated by behavioural psychologist Skinner, who applied Watson and Raynor's theory of conditioning to the way humans acquire language. Based on their experiments, Watson and Raynor formulated a stimulus-response theory of psychology. In this theory all complex forms of behaviour-motions, habits, and such—are seen as composed of simple muscular and glandular elements that can be observed and measured. They claimed that emotional reactions are learned in much the same way as other skills. The key point of the theory of conditioning is that “you can train an animal to do anything if you follow a certain procedure which has three major stages, stimulus, response, and reinforcement” (Harmer, 1983:30).

Based on the theory of conditioning, Skinner suggested that language is also a form of behaviour. It can be learned the same way as an animal is trained to respond to stimuli. This theory of learning is referred to as behaviourism, which was adopted for some time by the language teaching profession, particularly in the U. S. One influential result is the audio-lingual method, which involves endless listen and repeat drilling activities. The idea of this method is that language is learned by constant repetition and the reinforcement of the teacher. Mistakes were immediately corrected, and correct utterances were immediately praised. This method is still used in many parts of the world today.

Cognitive theory: The term cognitivism is often used loosely to describe methods in which students are asked to think rather than simply repeat. It seems to be largely the result of Noam Chomsky's reaction to Skinner's behaviourist theory, which leads to the revival of structural linguistics. The key point of Chomsky's theory is reflected in his most famous question: if all language is a learned behaviour, how can a child produce a sentence that has never been said by others before?

According to Chomsky, language is not a form of behaviour, it is an intricate rule-based system and a large part of language acquisition is the learning of this system. There are a finite number of grammatical rules in the system and with a knowledge of these an infinite number of sentences can be produced. A language learner acquires language competence which enables him to produce language.

Though Chomsky's theory is not directly applied in language teaching, it has had impact on the profession. One influential idea is that students should be allowed to create their own sentences based on their understanding of certain rules. This idea is clearly in opposition to the audio-lingual method.

Although people are pretty much still in the dark as to what language is and how language is learned, it is believed that general knowledge about language and language learning will help language teachers do a better job.

Constructivist theory: The constructivist theory believes that learning is a process in which the learner constructs meaning based on his/her own experiences and what he/she already knows. Although constructivist theory was not developed for the understanding of language learning, it is widely applicable to learning in general. It is believed that education



is used to develop the mind, not just to rote recall what is learned. John Dewey provided a foundation for constructivism. He believed that teaching should be built based on what learners already knew and engage learners in learning activities. Teachers need to design environments and interact with learners to foster inventive, creative, critical learners. Therefore, teachers must balance an understanding of the habits, characteristics as well as personalities of individual learners with an understanding of the means of arousing learners' interests and curiosity for learning.

Socio-constructivist theory: Similar to constructivist theory, socio-constructivist theory represented by Vygotsky emphasizes interaction and engagement with the target language in a social context based on the concept of "Zone of Proximal Development" and scaffolding. In other words, learning is best achieved through the dynamic interaction between the teacher and the learner and between learners. With the teacher's scaffolding through questions and explanations, or with a more capable peers' support, the learner can move to a higher level of understanding and extend his /her skills and knowledge to the fullest potential.

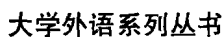
Practical utilization of language learning theory

Though these learning theories characterize hypotheses because of lacking confirmation experiments, they are being and will be further tested by studying and quantitative methods. Therefore, we should not neglect the fact that English teaching practically is definitely conditioned by them. Every English teacher, researchers of English teaching and methodologies are supposed to know them well and try to put them into practice from four aspects.

(1) Creation. The learning theory is a source of creation. Any creativeness in foreign language teaching relies on the theory. Quite a lot of English teachers in Chinese secondary schools work hard on techniques and disciplines and they try to innovate upon them. But the problem is that they pay little attention to the factors affecting students' learning methods which are composed of association or cognition, or natural acquisition by students or arbitrary teaching from the teacher, they bind themselves within a limitation of narrow thinking. In that case they will hamper their creativeness of teaching. When concentrating on the learning theory, they will be sure to do it more easily and to extend their creative powers.

(2) Discernment. People involved in foreign language teaching must often discern themselves and their colleagues in the activities of teaching, learning and researching. It is the routing for teachers and teaching researchers to discern success from failure of classroom teaching, where the learning theory superior to others should be used as norm because of the fact that teaching is a complexity and many a theory is involved. So it is right to say that learning theories are a discerning mirror of teaching and learning activities. It has been proved that if the teacher applies these theories to his or her principles of methods and has them tested, they would be realistic and effective. Otherwise, the methods would not work.

(3) Research. Research on learning theories should be done by every teacher and not left only to the experts. Discovery of problems existing in teaching is a premise of research. Recognition of problems occurs in research proceeding and solution to the problems is its



(4) Application. There is no exception that English teaching personnel use knowledge, skills and methods in their teaching practice. No matter what and how they use, there should be a criterion for the coordination of their application of them. The theories of learning, being concise and in commonly wide use, are appropriate to serve such a criterion. If a teacher thinks that learning a foreign language depends on a connection or association of knowledge impartment and skill training, then concentration should be put on the latter rather than the former. When learning a foreign language is thought to be relied on recognition and understanding of the material exposed to students, a total emphasis is placed on their rational activities. Unquestionably, the learning theory is highly principled for application, and it should not be underestimated at all.

To summarize, as a source of creation, a discerning mirror, a basis for research and a principle of application to English teaching, learning theories are of extremely practical value. However they are, especially those theories concerning the learning of English are still falling into neglect. We are now in duty bound and it is an opportune moment for us to seize to make them developed.

Task 1

Below is a list of interview questions on how people learn a foreign language. In the first column, write down your own responses. Then interview two other students in your class and enter their responses in the other columns. Discuss your findings in groups of 4 and draw some conclusions.

Questions	You	ST1	ST2
1. How many foreign languages can you speak so far?			
2. When did you start learning the foreign languages?			
3. How do you feel about learning a foreign language?			
4. What difficulties have you experienced in learning?			
5. Which skills do you find more difficult to learn?			
6. Have you focused on knowledge or skills? Why?			
7. Why do you learn the foreign language?			



Questions	You	ST1	ST2
8. Do you consider yourself a successful learner? Why?			
9. What are your most common learning activities?			
10. Do you like the way you learned the foreign language?			

From the above task, you may have found that (1) people started learning a foreign language at different ages; (2) people have different experiences in learning a foreign language, some find it easy, some find it difficult; (3) people learn languages for different reasons; (4) people learn languages in different ways; (5) people have different understandings about language learning; (6) people have different capabilities in language learning; (7) learning can be affected by the way how language is taught; (8) learning is affected by the degree of success one is expected to achieve; and more. Thus the challenge confronting language teaching is how teaching methodology can ensure successful learning by all the learners who have more differences than the commonality.

Study questions

1. Look at the definitions of language. How are they different from each other? Why are there differences in such definitions?

2. Linguistics isn't the only discipline with its theoretical and applied aspects. How would you describe similar distinctions in psychology, sociology, or other disciplines with which you are familiar?



Unit 2 First Language Acquisition

This unit focuses on:

- * Theories of first language acquisition
- * Some terms

Theories of first language acquisition

There is no one who has not at some time witnessed the remarkable ability of children to communicate. As small babies, children babble and coo and cry and vocally or non vocally send an extraordinary number of messages and receive even more messages. As they reach the end of their first year, specific attempts are made to imitate words and speech sounds heard around them, and about this time they utter their first "words". By about 18 months of age these words have multiplied considerably and are beginning to appear in combination with each other to form two-word and three-word "sentences" commonly referred to as "telegraphic" utterances—such as "allgone milk," "bye-bye Daddy," "gimme toy," and so forth. The production tempo now begins to increase as more and more words are spoken every day and more and more combinations of two-word and three-word sentences are uttered. By about age 3, children can comprehend an incredible quantity of linguistic behavior; their speech capacity mushrooms as they become the generator of nonstop chattering and incessant conversation, language thus becoming a mixed blessing for those around them! This fluency continues into school age as children internalize increasingly complex structures, expand their vocabulary, and sharpen communicative skills. At school age, children not only learn what to say but what not to say as they learn the social functions of their language.

How can we explain this fantastic journey from that first anguished cry at birth to adult competence in a language? From the first word to tens of thousands? From telegraphese at 18 months to the compound—complex, cognitively precise, socioculturally appropriate sentences just a few short years later? It is these sorts of questions that theories of language acquisition attempt to answer.

In principle you can adopt one of two polarized positions in the study of first language acquisition. The extreme behavioristic position would be that children come into the world with a tabula rasa, a clean slate bearing no preconceived notions about the world or about language, and these children are then shaped by their environment, slowly conditioned through various schedules of reinforcement. At the other extreme, you would find a position that claims that children come into this world with very specific innate knowledge, knowledge that includes not only general predispositions and tendencies but also knowledge of the nature of language and of the world. Then, through their own volition, they act upon their