A Study on Language Learning and Teaching

语言学习与语言教学研究

刘孟兰 著

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前　言

随着语言学理论研究的不断深入和现代科学技术的快速发展，语言学习和语言教学研究成果在许多领域的应用都取得了重大的进展。尤其在21世纪，语言学习与语言教学研究已成为应用语言学中发展最为成熟的学科之一，而且正在不断深入。

本书以现代语言学理论为指导，以二语习得理论为基础，结合心理语言学、社会语言学、应用语言学、二语习得、语言测试及计算机网络语言等相关领域的理论和应用研究成果，构建了本书的整体框架；并结合中国英语教学现状试图探讨我国英语教学的新模式，希望能对未来的英语学习与英语教学发展方向有所启迪。

全书共分四部分，11章。第一部分简述了现代语言学习和语言教学的基本理论，教与学的本质及相互关系。论述了二语习得理论及二语习得的五个阶段、教学原则和策略。第二部分论述了20世纪语言学习与教学的发展及主要教学法；论述了21世纪的主流教学法——交际教学法的理论与实践。第三部分，由于进入21世纪，语言学习和语言教学的明显特征是语言理论和教学方法的多样化。本部分从理论及实践上研究了国内外以交际教学法为主流的现代教学法的新途径：任务教学法、互动教学法、体验教学法、混合教学法。第四部分是教学实证研究部分，分别选自作者的科研课题。旨在研究和探讨语言学习和语言教学理论在教学实践中的应用，试图探索一条符合我国学生特点的新途径。

作者在本书撰写过程中参考了大量国内外资料和研究成果，谨在此向有关作者表示感谢。此外，祁光颖、陈捷、杨阳和陈绍英同志参加了本书部分内容的编写，张彬粉同学一直参与对本书的打印和整理工作，还有许多同事及部分研究生也参加了资料整理工作并提出了宝贵的意见，为本书作出了贡献，作者表示衷心的感谢。

由于作者水平有限，书中的错误和不妥之处恳请广大读者和同行批评指正。

刘孟兰

2008年3月于哈尔滨

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Contents

Part One Language Learning Theory …… (1)
1 Modern Basic Learning and Teaching Theory …… (1)
1.1 Definition of Language …… (1)
1.2 Nature of Learning and Teaching …… (3)
1.3 Relationships between Learning and Teaching …… (5)
1.4 Nature of Modern Foreign Language Learning and Teaching …… (6)
2 Second Language Acquisition Theory and Instructional Strategies …… (9)
2.1 The Theory of Second Language Acquisition …… (9)
2.2 Stages and Hypothesis for Second Language Acquisition …… (12)
2.3 General Principles for Teaching English Language Learners …… (16)
2.4 Implications for Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Chinese Context …… (23)
Part Two Modern Foreign Language Learning and Teaching …… (26)
3 Development of Language Teaching Approaches …… (26)
3.1 The Dominant Approaches in Language Teaching in the 20th Century …… (26)
3.2 Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in the 21st Century …… (29)
3.3 Classroom Model for Communication Competence … (35)

Part Three The Latest Language Teaching Approaches in 21st Century …… (43)
4 Task-Based Language Teaching Approach …… (43)
4.1 Definitions of Task …… (43)
4.2 Tasks Goals for Task-Based Learning and Teaching …… (49)
4.3 Task Types …… (51)
4.4 Importance of the Task: Low or High stakes …… (52)
4.5 Task Based Models …… (59)
4.6 The Three Approaches of Task Based Learning and Teaching …… (63)
4.7 The Advantages of Task-based Language Learning … (66)
4.8 Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching in China …… (67)
5 Interactive Language Teaching Approach …… (72)
5.1 Definition of Interaction …… (72)
5.2 Theory of Interaction …… (73)
5.3 Interactive Language Teaching …… (81)
5.4 Interactive Language Learning and Teaching in China …… (92)
6 Experiential Language Teaching Approach …… (98)
6.1 Experiential Language Learning …… (98)
6.2 Experiential Education …… (106)
6.3 Experiential Learning and Teaching in China …… (116)
7 Blended Language Teaching Approach …… (124)
7.1 Background of Blended Learning and Teaching …… (124)
7.2 Definition of Blended Learning …… (125)
7.3 Analysis of Notion of Blended Learning …… (129)
7.4 Blended Teaching Models …… (135)
7.5 Principal Differences between Traditional and New

Learning Environment ..... (139)
7.6 Application of Blended Teaching for Foreign Language Acquisition ..... (140)
7.7 Implication to the Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education ..... (144)
7.8 Blended Language Teaching Approach in China ..... (148)
Part Four Empirical Studies on Language Learning and Teaching ..... (151)
8 A Study on Multi-Interactive Teaching Approach in College English Writing Teaching ..... (151)
8.1 The Background of the Study ..... (151)
8.2 Literature Review ..... (153)
8.3 Multi-interactive Teaching Approach (MITA) in English Writing ..... (157)
8.4 An Experiment on MITA in College English Writing Teaching ..... (164)
8.5 Findings and Discussion ..... (181)
9 A Study on Reinforcing Communicative Oral English Testing to Promote Interactive Oral English Teaching ... (185)
9.1 Current Oral Testing and Current Situation of College Oral English Teaching ..... (185)
9.2 A Model of New Oral Test ..... (189)
9.3 A Model of Interactive Oral English Teaching ..... (196)
9.4 An Investigation of English Teaching and Study ..... (198)
10 A Study on Application of Vocabulary Learning Strategies in FLT ..... (207)
10.1 Framework of the Study ..... (207)
10.2 An Empirical Study ..... (208)
10.3 Results and Analyses of Questionnaire ..... (210)

10.4 Results and Analyses of Experimental Teaching Study ..... (220)
10.5 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications ..... (229)
11 A Study on Applying the Schema Theory into Listening Teaching ..... (233)
11.1 The Background of the Study ..... (233)
11.2 The Theoretical Basis of the Study ..... (236)
11.3 Building Linguistic Schema in Listening Teaching ..... (242)
11.4 An Experimental Study ..... (247)
11.5 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications ..... (251)
Appendix ..... (254)
Bibliography ..... (278)

Part One Language Learning Theory

Introduction

Modern basic learning and teaching theory, nature of learning and teaching and relationship between them are discussed in Chapter One. Second language acquisition theory, stages and principles in second language learning and teaching are discussed in Chapter Two in this part.

1 Modern Basic Learning and Teaching Theory

1.1 Definition of Language

To define what is language is very difficult because there is no simple and single answer to this question. Different linguistic scholars have viewed language from different perspectives and have given different definitions and descriptions of language.

The most commonly accepted definition of language now is: "Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication." (Wardhaugh, 1977). This does not appear to be very original at the first sight, but each word in it has been chosen with extreme care to capture one important aspect of language.

By "system" we mean the recurring patterns or arrangements or the particular ways or designs in which a language operates. All elements in the system of language are arranged in accordance with certain rules; they can not be combined at will. In English, for example, " *brip* " is not a correct word; " *He tables a green*" is not an acceptable sentence, either. It is because the sounds, which are used to form words and the

words, which are used to form sentences do not appear at random but are arranged and used in fixed patterns and according to certain systems or rules so that speakers of a language can understand one another. If language were not systematic, it could not be learned or used consistently. In other words, it is because every language has its system that it conveys the same meaning to the different speakers.

By "arbitrary vocal symbols" it is meant, that anything that represent something else is a symbol. For example, the dove is the symbol of peace. Language consists of another type of symbols, sounds symbols or speech sounds. These symbols are not chosen for any particular reasons but at random. That is to say, the relationship between the sound symbols and the objects, events or ideas that these symbols represent are arbitrary. Language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic connection between the word pen and the thing we use to write with. Although the choice of certain sound symbols to represent certain objects, events or ideas is arbitrary, once the relationship is established, it becomes a fixed convention, i . e. the use of these sound symbols is by no means arbitrary but follows certain conventions which speakers of the language have agreed upon. It is because the sounds and words of a language are used in fixed ways that the speakers of the language can understand one another, thus making communications and interaction possible.

Everybody agrees that language is used for human communication. Language is possessed only by human beings. It allows people to say things to one another and to express their thoughts and needs. Animals also have communication systems such as the dance of bees and the bark of dogs. But no system of animal communication is characterized by duality, and few systems of animal communication use discrete arbitrary symbols. Any animal communications are closely and directly related to their basic needs of life. None of them allow their users to reminiscence

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over the past, speculate about the future and tell lies like human language. Systems of animal communication can only indicate simple things such as source of food, and express simple emotions such as happiness, hunger or anger. But human language can express very complex ideas such as making hypotheses and devising theories or complicated feelings such as both love and hate at the same time. In short, language is a unique system of communication, and it is the cornerstone of society.

1.2 Nature of Learning and Teaching

1.2.1 Nature of Learning

Human beings are continually engaged in some sort of learning activities all their lives, for example, learning to ride a bicycle, and speak a foreign language. But what is learning? Contemporary dictionaries define that learning is "acquiring or getting knowledge of a subject or a skill by study, experience, or instruction". A more specialized definition reads as follows: "Learning is a relatively permanent change in a behavioral tendency and is the result of reinforced practice." (Kimble & Garmezy, 1963). Both human beings and animals may result in some changes in behavior through repeated practice. The above two definitions therefore, reflect the difficulty of defining the complex concept of learning. If we try to break up the essential components that form the concept of learning, we find that learning contains a number of characteristic features:

(1) Learning is acquisition or "getting".

(2) Learning is retention of knowledge, information or skill.

(3) Retention implies storage systems, memory, and cognitive organization.

(4) Learning involves active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism.

(5) Learning is relatively permanent, but subject to forgetting.

(6) Learning involves some form of practice, perhaps reinforced practice.

(7) Learning is a change in behavior.

The concept of learning has been greatly influenced by the psychological study of the learning process. The psychological concept of learning goes far beyond learning directly from a teacher or learning through study or practice. What should be stressed here is that the concept of learning not only includes the learning of skills or the acquisition of knowledge, it also refers to abstract and psychological aspects of learning, such as learning to learn and learning to think, the modification of attitudes, acquisition of interests, social values, or social roles, and even changes in personality.

Language learning, in keeping with this broad interpretation, is also very widely understood. It may include all kinds of language learning in which no formal teaching is provided. First, there is the vast area of first language acquisition. Secondly, in the natural second language settings, an individual, without any specific instruction, acquires new terms, meanings, jargons, slang, codes or registers. He may learn new patterns of intonation, new gestures, or postures, or acquire a new dialect. We cannot ignore all such "natural", "unguided" or "informal" language learning.

1.2.2 Nature of Teaching

Teaching cannot be defined apart from learning and it is implied in the definition of learning. Teaching can be defined as "showing or helping someone to learn how to do something, giving instruction, guiding in the study of something, providing with knowledge, causing to know or understand" (Kimble & Garmezy, 1963). Teaching presupposes learning. Without teaching, learning can still happen and stand by itself; but without learning, there would never be any teaching. Therefore, teaching is the activity, which is intended to bring about learning. Teaching is

guiding and the task of teaching is to guide and facilitate learning, enabling the learner to learn and setting he conditions for learning. Teaching can act upon learning while the latter cannot. It can only provide feedback, which will enable the teacher to improve and adjust his syllabus. Theories of teaching should specify the following features:

(1) The knowledge that most effectively leads the individual to a predisposition toward learning.

(2) The ways in which a body of knowledge should be structured so that the learner can most readily grasp it.

(3) The most effective sequences in which to present the materials to be earned.

(4) The nature and pacing of rewards and punishments in the process of earning and teaching.

It should he noted that leaching should be more widely interpreted than classroom instruction only. Teaching should be interpreted in a broader sense in that it not only includes formal instruction or methods of training, it can also mean individualized instruction, like parental tutoring and self-study, and other means of education such as computer-assisted instruction, the use of media through TV and radio. Likewise, the supporting activities in foreign language teaching, such as the preparation of teaching materials, teaching grammars or dictionaries, the training of teachers, the designing of syllabus and the planning of teaching programs, all fall under the category of language teaching. To sum up, we should interpret teaching widely so as to include all activities intended to bring about language learning.

1.3 Relationships between Learning and Teaching

The relationship between learning and teaching is that theories of learning will yield theories of teaching. Learning is the prerequisite and basis of teaching. Theories of learning always determine theories, meth-

odologies and techniques of teaching. The understanding of a theory of learning is needed before theory of teaching can be formed. Our understanding of how the learner earns is very important and will determine our theory of teaching, teaching style, approach, method, and classroom technique. For example, if we look at Learning as a process of stimulus and response, through a carefully paced program of reinforcement, naturally we will teach accordingly and adopt the audio-lingual method (ALM) in our teaching. If we understand learning as the acquisition of linguistic structures, our teaching method is probably more teacher-oriented, and will adopt the grammar-translation method. On the other hand, if we focus on the communicative competence in the language teaching, we may use student-centered method instead and try to train the students' ability to use language for communicative purposes. And if we consider language learning as a process of cognitive activities, we will get students involved in learning rules and meaning and develop cognitive structures.

1.4 Nature of Modern Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

1.4.1 Theoretical Basis of FLT

In the field of modern foreign language teaching, it is unanimously agree that foreign language teaching uses, above anything else, linguistics. But what else is applied in foreign language teaching besides linguistics? People with a narrow view would say sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, or other hybrid fields closely related to linguistics. Others with a broader view would say that anything could be applied in relation with linguistics. But we would say that foreign language teaching and use serves as the mediator between what is applied and what it is applied to. Here the key question is which is the decisive factor in the process of application? Is linguistic theory or what is applied determines the field of

application or vice versa? The answer is that the field of application determines the theory of application. What is applied is determined by what it is applied to, i. e. the field of application. For example, in studying the practical problems in speech therapy, we find it natural and necessary to apply theories of neuro-linguistics. But in the field of foreign language teaching, we would apply quite different theories such as psycholinguistics and pedagogy to it because foreign language teaching needs theories very different from those which speech therapy requires. In addition, we also need to make clear that what is applied should be linguistic theories or any language-related theories.

We do not agree to the broad view that anything can be combined with linguistics and applied in the field of foreign language teaching and language use.

What is more, we need to stress that what it is applied to should be areas related to language, not any field which has nothing to do with language.

1.4.2 Nature of Modern Foreign Language Teaching

As one of the most important branches of applied linguistics, foreign language teaching is a scientific discipline with a system of theory and practice. Its nature can be well understood from the following characteristics.

(1) Foreign language teaching is an independent discipline, an independent field in its own right, because

• It has its own object of study, i. e. language learning and teaching.

• It has its own scientific system of theories and methodologies, for example, 1st and 2nd language learning theories, and foreign language research methods such as contrastive analysis, error analysis, testing, etc.

• It has its own researchers and practitioners. There are millions

upon millions of foreign language teachers around the world today, and each year Britain trains about 1 000 languages leaching researchers or applied linguistic professionals.

(2) Foreign language teaching is an interdisciplinary discipline in that it not only draws upon theories from a single science, but from several sciences such as sociology and psychology. Therefore, its application is also interdisciplinary. It applies psycholinguistics or sociolinguistics, etc. in the teaching and learning of languages.

(3) Foreign language teaching is an applied science. Its objective is to solve practical problems in language learning and teaching. Like pure sciences, foreign language teaching is also concerned with the implications of the theoretical fields such as linguistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

(4) Foreign language teaching is an empirical science. Like natural sciences, it uses experiments as its basic way of language research.

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