



外语教学法丛书之九

HOW LANGUAGES ARE LEARNED

语言学习机制

Patsy M. Lightbown and
Nina Spada

上海外语教育出版社

SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS



外教社

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

语言学习机制=How Languages Are Learned / (英)赖特本(Lightbown, M.), (英)斯巴达(Spada, N.)著. —上海:上海外语教育出版社, 2002

(外语教学法丛书)

ISBN 7-81080-611-4

I. 语… II. ①赖…②斯… III. 外语教学—学习方法—英文 IV. H09

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2002)第081990号

图字: 09-2002-382号

出版发行: 上海外语教育出版社

(上海外国语大学内) 邮编: 200083

电 话: 021-65425300(总机), 35051812(发行部)

电子邮箱: bookinfo@sflep.com.cn

网 址: <http://www.sflep.com.cn> <http://www.sflep.com>

责任编辑: 钱明丹

印 刷: 常熟市华顺印刷有限公司
经 销: 新华书店上海发行所
开 本: 880×1230 1/32 印张6.75 字数268千字
版 次: 2002年11月第1版 2002年11月第1次印刷
印 数: 8000册

书 号: ISBN 7-81080-611-4 / H·236
定 价: 12.50元

本版图书如有印装质量问题,可向本社调换

总 序

近年来随着国内和国际形势的发展,我国对外语人才的渴求日益增加,有志于学习外语的学生和社会群体的人数急剧上升,从而使我国外语教学事业蓬勃发展。在这种形势下,外语师资培训和自身建设的重要性与日俱增。在这两方面,当务之急是要了解当今国外外语教学的发展情况,要借鉴国外的最新经验,结合我国的具体情况,大力提高外语师资的水平,使我们的外语教学事业更上一层楼。

有鉴于此,上海外语教育出版社为广大外语教师提供了一套由国外引进的外语教学法丛书。这套丛书所涉及的方面广、种类多,包括外语教学技巧和原则、语法教学、语音教学、阅读教学、写作教学、教学管理、测试、教材选择、第一语言和第二语言习得、儿童英语教学等等。其中绝大多数专著是上世纪九十年代和本世纪所出版。它们反映了当今国外外语教学法研究及相关学科的现状。

这套丛书的最大共同特点,也是与传统教学法类专著的最大不同点在于特别强调理论与实践相结合;更是以实践为主,再以理论去分析评述各种实践活动的优缺点。我们所熟悉的传统教学法类专著,一般都是强调教学原则、教学理论,把各种方法的来龙去脉讲得很详尽;然而如何到课堂上去进行具体教学活动,如何在教学活动中去体现教学原则却不多见。这套丛书则几乎全部是从实践活动着手,以说明对理论和原则的应用。

试举两个例证:

一、斯克里温纳:《学习教学:英语教师指南》,麦克米伦海涅曼出版社,1994。(Jim Scrivener: *Learning Teaching: A Guidebook for English Language Teachers*. Macmillan Heinemann, 1994)

作者前言：“本书旨在帮助你去学习如何更有效地进行教学。它并不给你某一种正确的教学方法。实际上没有任何科学根据可以让我们去描述一种理想的教学方法。我们只能观察教师和学生进行活动的实际，并注意哪些策略和原则更有利于教学。我们没有必要去照搬那些策略和原则，但是要意识到有哪些可能性。”“因此本书并不是告诉你‘就用这种方法’，而代之以‘这几种方法似乎都可行。’主要是由你自己决定用哪一种方法。”

本书共十二章，涉及教与学的关系、教学安排、课堂活动、语言技能等方面，绝大部分章节都是先介绍该章内容，然后列出各种具体教学活动(tasks)，其后是对各项活动的分析评述。例如第六章“说的技能”共有四小节，即1)为什么要说；2)交际性活动；3)语言交际与流利；4)演戏和角色扮演，每节都提供各种相应的具体活动和作者对各项活动的评述。教师可以根据自己的实际情况选择其中某些活动进行课堂教学。

二、努南：《语言学习研究方法》，剑桥大学出版社，1992。
(David Nunan: *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, 1992)

作者前言：“传统的语言教学研究方法是教老师怎样去进行教学的。作者主观愿望就是对教学作出种种硬性规定。这种教学科研基于逻辑推理，并要求教学人员接受采纳。上世纪八十年代以来情况有了变化，如今教学人员对自身进行科研。他们用实验方法对教学进行探索。这种科研由于教学背景不同而不同。教学人员不再依赖已有科研成果，而是对自己的课堂教学采取一种科研态度。本书目的在于1.促使教学人员认识对自身进行科研的必要性。2.帮助教学人员进行教学方面的科研。”

本书共十章，介绍科研方法的历史背景、实验性科研方法、个案研究、课堂现场观察和科研、自省方法、语言交流分析等等。试以第六章“自省方法”为例。所谓“自省”，就是不仅仅着眼于课堂上的教学实践，而要更进一步去思考教学步骤。教学人员一方面审视自己的教学，一方面回顾课堂教学的具体步骤并提出问题进行研究。这种科研的基础就是教学人员本人的日记、教学日记和其他种种有关记录，以这些资料为依据进行分析研究，得出结论。

以上两书的内容安排大体上可以概括整套丛书的全貌。换言之

之,各书的最大特点就是以实践为主,而实践都来自相应的理论并与理论密切结合;其实用性强,可操作性强。有大量的实践举例,还有不少个案研究(case study),在其后多数有分析评述。这些例证分析、评述给予教师很大的空间去进行思考、探索。各种例证并不是仅仅给教师提供方便,让教师有所参考。更重要的是促使教师结合自己的具体教学情况,通过思考和探索有所发展,制订出切合自己需要并切实可行的教学方法去进行教学。

我相信这套丛书能为促进我国外语教学事业的进一步发展作出巨大的贡献。

李观仪

2002年6月

出版前言

随着我国改革开放的深入和进入世界贸易组织的需要,英语教学在国内有了进一步的发展,对不同层次的英语教师的需求量日益增大。为了培养一大批高素质的英语教师,必须有组织地开展师资培训工作。在职的英语教师也必须继续充电,通过种种途径进一步提高业务水平。然而,许久以来,系统介绍英语教学法的专著极为匮乏。因此,上海外语教育出版社特从国外知名出版社,如牛津大学出版社、剑桥大学出版社和麦克米伦出版社引进一批有关外语教学法和第二语言习得研究的学术专著,出版了外语教学法丛书。《语言学习机制》(*How Languages Are Learned*)就是其中的一本。

本书作者 Pasty M. Lightbown 是加拿大蒙特利尔康考地亚大学应用语言学系名誉教授, Nina Spada 是加拿大安大略省多伦多大学和安大略省教育学院现代语言中心教授。两位作者从事外语教育及研究多年,并在二外习得理论、英语教学法、语言教育领域发表了多部专著和论文。两位作者深入浅出地阐述了母语和第二语言习得的主要理论,帮助外语教师更好地理解层出不穷的各种外语教学方法和不断推陈出新的教材,使教师能够根据不同的教学目的选取正确的教学方法和教材,而不为五花八门的所谓“新”教学方法和打着“新颖”旗号的教材所迷惑。

全书共分7章,分别介绍了母语习得理论,二外学习机制,影响二外学习的因素,学习者语言(learner language)分析,如何观察与分析外语的课堂教学,母语习得和二外学习的异同,二外课堂教学与语言自然习得的区别等问题。本书在导论中提出了12种有关外语教学的通俗观点,在最后一章中又结合前面各章的理论和研究对这些观点进行了分析,指出不少观点似是而非,必须引起外语教师的注意。

本书的特点是在论述非常专业化的问题时能够运用深入浅出的语言,同时也提出了许多研究的方法,组织学生进行有关的活动来验证理论。这种通过研究活动来验证理论的方法对于外语教师来说是发展研究能力的一种极其重要的手段。

本书适用于广大的大、中、小学外语教师,特别适用于年轻教师的培训,对于攻读外语教学理论的硕士生和博士生来说,也是一本不可多得的参考读物。

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the preparation of the second edition we have had the support and encouragement of many colleagues and students. Roy Lyster, Vicki Murphy, Laura Collins, Mela Sarkar, and Ahlem Ammar read chapters and offered valuable suggestions for improvement. Randall Halter was, as always, the rock solid man behind the computers. We appreciate the feedback offered by Henry Widdowson and two anonymous Oxford University Press reviewers.

We repeat our thanks to Leila Ranta and Jude Rand for their essential contributions to the first edition. We thank the English Speaking Union for conferring the 1993 Duke of Edinburgh book prize for Applied Linguistics on the book.

Above all, we are indebted to the many readers of the first edition. Without their enthusiastic response, which has astonished and delighted us, there would be no second edition!

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INTRODUCTION

Every few years, new foreign language teaching methods arrive on the scene. New textbooks appear far more frequently. They are usually proclaimed to be more effective than those that have gone before, and, in many cases, these methods or textbooks are promoted or even prescribed for immediate use. New methods and textbooks may reflect current developments in linguistic/applied linguistic theory or recent pedagogical trends. Sometimes they are said to be based on recent developments in language acquisition theory and research. For example, one approach to teaching may emphasize the value of having students imitate and practise a set of correct sentences while another emphasizes the importance of encouraging 'natural' communication between learners.

How is a teacher to evaluate the potential effectiveness of new methods? One important basis for this evaluation is, of course, the teacher's own experience with previous successes or disappointments. In addition, teachers who are informed about some of the findings of recent research are better prepared to judge whether the new proposals for language teaching are likely to bring about positive changes in students' learning.

This book about how languages are learned has been written for second and foreign language teachers. We believe that information about findings and theoretical views in second language acquisition research can help teachers evaluate claims made by textbook writers and proponents of various language teaching methods.

The book begins with a chapter on how children learn their first language. This background is important because both second language research and second language teaching have been influenced by changes in our understanding of how children acquire their first language. In fact, one of the significant findings of second language acquisition research has been that there are important similarities between first and second language acquisition. In Chapter 2, several theories which have been proposed to account for second language learning are presented and assessed. Questions raised in Chapters 1 and 2 include: What are some of the characteristics of language learning in the early stages? Is language learning just like any other kind of learning? To what extent can theories of first language acquisition be applied to second language learning? Is there a biologically determined age limit for language acquisition? How important are imitation and practice for language learning? Does it help to correct learners when they make errors?

In Chapter 3, we turn our attention to how individual learner characteristics and different contexts for second language learning may affect success. The discussion includes issues such as the importance of learners' attitudes toward the second language and its speakers, and the possibility that there is a special aptitude for language learning. The question of how the learner's age affects success in second language learning is also discussed.

In Chapter 4, we review some of the research findings about second language learners' changing knowledge of the language and their ability to use that knowledge. We look at interpretations of learners' errors and at the characteristics of learners' language at different stages of development.

Chapter 5 begins with a comparison of natural and instructional environments for second language learning. We then examine some different ways in which classroom researchers have observed and described teaching practices in second language classrooms. Transcriptions of teacher-student interactions illustrate some of the ways in which language learning in the classroom may be affected by the special characteristics of that environment.

In Chapter 6, we examine five proposals for the most effective way to teach a second language. For each of the proposals, research findings are presented and discussed. This makes it possible to reflect on the type and amount of evidence available for assessing the effectiveness of the different approaches.

In Chapter 7, some popular views about language learning and teaching are critically examined in light of current research.

A Glossary provides a quick reference for a number of terms which may be new or which have specific technical meanings in the context of language acquisition research. Glossary words are italicized where they first appear in the text. For readers who would like to have more detailed information about some of the research, a list of sources and further readings is included at the end of each chapter, and there is a Bibliography at the end of the book.

We have tried to present the information in a way which does not assume that readers are already familiar with research methods or theoretical issues. Each chapter summarizes important developments in first and/or second language acquisition research and theory. Examples and case studies are included throughout the book to illustrate the research ideas. Many of the examples are taken from second language classrooms. We have included a number of activities which give readers the opportunity to practise some of the techniques of observation and analysis from which we have drawn the ideas presented in this book.

-
- 1 Languages are learned mainly through imitation.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 2 Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 3 People with high IQs are good language learners.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 4 The most important factor in second language acquisition success is motivation.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 5 The earlier a second language is introduced in school programs, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 6 Most of the mistakes which second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 7 Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practise examples of each one before going on to another.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 8 Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 9 Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 10 Teachers should use materials that expose students to only those language structures which they have already been taught.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 11 When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example in group or pair activities), they learn each others' mistakes.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree
- 12 Students learn what they are taught.
strongly agree _____ strongly disagree

Before we begin . . .

It is probably true, as some have claimed, that most of us teach as we were taught or in a way that reflects our ideas and preferences about learning. Take a moment to reflect on your views about how languages are learned and what the implications are for how they should be taught. On page xv are twelve popular views about language learning. Think about whether you agree or disagree with some of these views. Complete the questionnaire and keep these ideas in mind as you read about current research and theory in second language learning.

In the last chapter of this book, we will return to these popular views and examine them in the light of the research on language learning which is discussed in Chapters 1–6.

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1 LEARNING A FIRST LANGUAGE

Language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development. We listen with pleasure to the 'coos' and 'gurgles' of a three-month-old baby. We laugh and 'answer' the conversational 'ba-ba-ba' babbling of older babies, and we share in the pride and joy of parents whose one-year-old has uttered the first 'bye-bye'. Indeed, learning a language is an amazing feat—one which has attracted the attention of linguists and psychologists for generations. How do children accomplish this? What is it that enables a child not only to learn words, but to put them together in meaningful sentences? What pushes children to go on developing complex grammatical language even though their early simple communication is successful for most purposes?

In this chapter, we will look briefly at some of the characteristics of the language of young children. We will then consider several theories which have been offered as explanations for how language is learned.

Milestones and patterns in development

One remarkable thing about first language acquisition is the high degree of similarity which we see in the early language of children all over the world. The earliest vocalizations are simply the involuntary crying that babies do when they are hungry or uncomfortable. Soon, however, we hear the cooing and gurgling sounds of contented babies, lying in their beds looking at bright shapes and colours around them. Even in these early weeks and months of life, however, infants are able to hear very subtle differences between the sounds of human language. In cleverly designed experiments, scientists have been able to show that tiny babies can hear the difference between 'pa' and 'ba', for example. And yet, it will be many months before their own vocalizations (babbling) begin to reflect the characteristics of the different languages they are learning.

By the end of their first year, most babies understand quite a few frequently repeated words. They wave when someone says 'bye-bye'; they clap when someone says 'pat-a-cake'; they eagerly hurry to the kitchen when 'juice and cookies' are announced. At 12 months, most babies will have begun to produce a word or two that everyone recognizes. From this time on, the number of words they understand and produce grows rapidly. By the age of two, most children reliably produce at least fifty different words and some produce many many more. About this time, they begin to combine words into simple sentences such as 'Mommy juice' and 'baby fall down'. These sentences are sometimes called 'telegraphic' because they often leave out such things as articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs. We recognize them as sentences because, even though function words and *grammatical morphemes* are missing, the word order reflects the word order of the language they are hearing and the combined words have a meaning relationship between them which makes them more than just a list of words. Thus, for an English-speaking child, 'kiss baby' does not mean the same thing as 'baby kiss'. Remarkably, we also see evidence, even in these early sentences, that children are doing more than imperfectly imitating what they have heard. Their two- and three-word sentences show signs that they are creatively combining words: 'more outside' in a situation where the meaning seems to be 'I want to go outside again' or 'Daddy uh-oh' which seems to mean 'Daddy fell down'.

By the age of three-and-a-half or four years, most children can ask questions, give commands, report real events, and create stories about imaginary ones—complete with correct grammatical morphemes. In fact, it is generally accepted that by age four, children have mastered the basic structures of the language or languages which have been spoken to them in these early years. In addition to the evidence we have from simply talking and listening to children, some carefully designed procedures have been developed to explore children's knowledge of language. One of the best known is the so-called 'wug test' developed by Jean Berko Gleason. In this 'test', children are shown pictures of imaginary creatures with novel names or people performing mysterious actions. For example, they are told, 'Here is a wug. Now there are two of them. There are two ____' or 'Here is a man who knows how to bod. Yesterday he did the same thing. Yesterday, he ____'. By completing these sentences with 'wugs' and 'boddod', children demonstrate that they actually know the rules for the formation of plural and simple past in English, not just a list of memorized word pairs such as 'book/books' and 'nod/nodded', and can apply these rules to words which they have never heard before.

Children's ability to understand language and to use it to express themselves develops rapidly in the pre-school years. *Metalinguistic awareness*—the ability to treat language as an object, separate from the meaning it conveys—develops more slowly. A dramatic development in metalinguistic awareness occurs when children begin to learn to read. Although metalinguistic