Foreign and Second Language Learning

外语与第二语言学习

William Littlewood 著

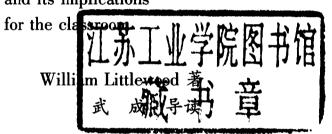# Foreign and Second Language Learning

外语与第二语言学习

Language-acquisition research
and its implications
for the classroom

William Littlewood 著

武 成 导读

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总 序

刘 润 清

外研社和人教社联合推出这套"剑桥英语教师丛书",以配合全国中小学英语教师的培训工程。付印之前,他们把这套丛书拿给我看,并让我写个总序。说实话,一看到这 20 个书名,我就十分喜欢,因为它们是外语教师培训中经常提到的题目;再看作者,大部分是应用语言学领域里颇有名气的研究者,如 Gillian Brown, William Littlewood, Jack C. Richards, David Nunan 等,于是我就愉快地接受了他们给我的任务。

我翻阅了这20本书,并阅读了《面向21世纪教育振兴行动计划》和其他有关中小学骨干教师的培训计划和实施方案。可以说,"剑桥英语教师丛书"涉及的知识面广(包括外语教学理论、外语教学实践、外语测试理论、外语教学研究中的方法),内容实用,文字通俗易懂,是中小学英语教师培训的好教材,它的引进出版必将加强外语专业的教材建设,一定会推动基础外语教育的改革。

细心的读者会发觉,在英语文献中,师资培训这个概念已变化三次。开始,人们都使用 teacher training 一词,但后来许多人认为,training 一词更多是指技术、手艺上的培训,是培训教书工匠的,对教师的通才教育和智力开发是不加过问的。于是出现了 teacher education(师资教育)这一用法,意思是说,这种培训不再只教给老师明天的听力课或阅读课如何如何去上,而是开设普通语言学、应用语言学、语言测试和评估、科研方法等课程,提高教师的理论意识,扩展他们的思维空间,很像我们讲的素质教育。但是,后来人们还是觉得"师资教育"对教师限制多了一些,因为这仍然只是把现成的理论或发现告诉教师。于是,最近常使用的概念叫 teacher development(师资发展),更加强调在"教育"的基础上,鼓励教师去反思自己的教学,观察自己的课堂行为,评估自己的教学效果,开展"教学行为中的科研"(action research),也就是说,教给教师如何在教学实践中验证别人的发现,形成自己的信念,反思自我,使每一次决定都有根有据,每一个判断都有理论支持。此外,还有一个中性的词叫 teacher preparation。这里不妨引用两段话加以说明。在 *Beyond Training* 一书中,

作者强调说：Without discounting the importance of basic teaching skills in teacher preparation, the orientation to teaching discussed in this book is an attempt to look beyond these dimensions of teaching to the beliefs, knowledge, and thinking that underlie their successful use. The argument pursued throughout the book therefore is that teacher education needs to engage teachers not merely in the mastery of rules of practice but in an exploration of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and thinking that inform such practice。在 *Second Language Teacher Education* 一书中，作者说：An alternative approach to the study of teaching and to the development of goals for teacher preparation programs is the examination of the total context of classroom teaching and learning in an attempt to understand how the interaction between and among teacher, learner, and classroom tasks affect learning. This can be called a holistic approach, since it focuses on the nature and significance of classroom events and involves both low-inference and high-inference categories. Such an approach implies different goals for teacher preparation:

"Holistic approaches work towards training goals not all of which can be broken down into individually verifiable training objectives, and they stress the development of personal qualities of creativity, judgement and adaptability... The formulatic or prescriptivist nature of a mere 'Vocabulary training' approach to [teacher training in TESOL] is contrasted by holists with an 'education' in more general principles"。(Britten, 1985a: 113)

"中小学骨干教师国家级培训方案"恰好符合"师资发展"这个基本精神。文件规定的培训内容包括：1. 教育理论与教学技能。着眼于提高中小学教师的理论文化素养，开拓视野，更新知识结构，提高职业成熟度，增强学术能力和自我提高能力；2. 教育教学实践与考察。着眼于提高中小学教师在工作中实施素质教育的能力，加强理论指导教学实践的能力，为形成教学风格和教学特色打基础；3. 课程研究。着眼于提高中小学教师的科研意识和研究能力，善于发现和掌握教育教学规律，善于反思性地总结，增强创新能力。这套"剑桥英语教师丛书"为这个实施方案的落实提供了教材上的保证。这 20 本书中，有几本是关于外语教学理论的，如 *Foreign and Second Language Learning*、*Psychology for Language Teachers*、*Affect in Language Learning*、*The Context of Language Teaching*，有几本是关于语言教学技能和实践的，如 *Teaching Listening Comprehension*、*Developing Reading Skills*、*Beginning to Write*、*Lessons from Noth-*

ing, Teaching the Spoken Language 等;有两本是关于语言测试与评估的:*Testing for Language Teachers* 和 *Classroom-based Evaluation in Second Language Education*;有两本是关于外语教学中的科研方法的:*Understanding Research in Second Language Learning*、*Action Research for Language Teachers*;还有三本是关于师资发展的:*Second Language Teacher Education*, *Beyond Training* 和 *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*。有关教师培训的这三本书也可以看做是有关教育理论和外语教学理论的著作。对一项中小学英语教师培训工作来说,这样几种内容就是足够用的了。

我建议,本套丛书的使用者注意两点:第一,这套书不仅仅传授技巧,更重要的是提供思想和方法;不是提供对问题的现成答案,而是告诉你各种理论观点和看法;阅读它们的最终目的不是要知道一篇课文如何来教,而是要知道如何进行创造性的思维。换句话说,这套书不是培训"教书匠"的,而是培训善于思考的教师和研究者的。每位语言教师对外语应该如何教和如何学都是有自己的信念的,只是有的教师的信念不可明白而已。学习语言教学理论,就是把你的信念理论化,让你在见到多种不同看法之后,根据自己的经历,形成自己的、有根有据的、可以言明的教学观点,并在实践中不断完善这种观点。只有这样,你在将来的实际工作中所作的决定才不是盲目的,而是有根据的,有一种自我反思和自我纠正的机制。

第二,本套丛书的读者应该努力初步掌握外语教学中的科研方法,学会设计小型的科研项目,学会进行课堂观察,设计问卷,经常写教学日志,会抽样,会收集各种数据,会统计和分析数据等。一旦学会进行研究,教学过程就不会再那么枯燥(因为你随时都在反思眼前所发生的一切),学生的语言错误不再那么令人愤怒(因为学生的中介语系统能告诉你许多鲜为人知的学习理论),教、学、科研将会成为一个有机的整体(教与学不断向科研提出新的问题;科研不断反馈于教和学)。可以设想,如果我们的绝大部分中小学英语教师都能做到以上两点,我国的基础英语教育会出现质的变化。

祝贺"剑桥英语教师丛书"在我国的出版!
祝中小学英语教师国家级培训工程圆满成功!

导　读

　　这是一部论述 70 年代初以来第二语言教学思想和研究的主要成果的学术专著。本书从理论方面扼要阐述了第二语言教学实践过程中极为重要而又往往容易被忽视的几个方面,即与第二语言学习直接相关的学习行为、心理、策略等问题。

　　本书作者 William.T.Littlewood 现任香港浸会大学语言系教授,是著名的应用语言学专家。他在多年的语言教学实践过程中,共发表了 4 部专著,包括《交际语言教学》、《口语交际教学》和《香港学生的语言学习》等,还有几十篇有关应用语言学研究的学术论文。

　　第二语言习得研究始于 20 世纪 70 年代初。近 30 年来,这一领域的研究蓬勃发展,取得了大量具有重大理论和实践意义的成就。随着第二语言教学职业化这一发展趋势,第二语言习得的研究正在成为一门涉及心理学、普通教育学、社会学等学科的但又相对独立的学科。这门学科围绕第二语言教学的理论和实践这一目的也正在形成一套完整的知识体系。作者撰写本书的目的就是通过论述、归纳第二语言习得研究的有关成果,加深我们对第二语言学习的理解,巩固取得的研究成果,促进我们对这一学科的探索和研究,从而使我们更深刻地了解学习主体,提高第二语言教学效果。

　　在第二语言教学的理论和实践探索过程中,曾产生了许多教学方法和技巧。这些方法和技巧具有扎实的理论基础,在很大程度上促进了语言教学的发展。但在现实的教学实践中,这些方法和技巧常常不能产生令人满意的教学效果。

　　本书作者立足于现有的第二语言习得的理论与实践知识,对学习者个体特点加以研究,以达到提高课堂教学效果的目的。

　　全书共分 8 章。

　　第一章"母语的习得"着眼于母语习得的研究成果对第二语言学习的影响,对英语作为母语习得的有关研究进行了简明扼要的归纳和论述。第二章"行为主义语言观与第二语言学习"和第三章"错误与学习策略"主要讨论了第二语言学习中的困难和语误之所在。这三章从行为主义语言观、认知发展、母语的影响、语言习得过程等多个侧面,辅之以实例分析,说明了第二语言学习者在学习过程中所担任的主观能动角色,确立了对语言学习者进行研究的重要性。

第四章"语言学习者的内在学习大纲"、第五章"学习者的个体差异分析"和第六章"第二语言学习模式"对第二语言学习过程中影响学生学习的种种因素和方式进行了详细的讨论。首先,学习者具有共同的语言习得程式,这个程式有时会受到母语的影响,而有时又不受它的制约。行为主义的"习惯养成"原则也有其积极的一面。其次,虽然对学习者在学习动机、学习机会、学习能力等方面的差异的研究还很有限,但这些因素无疑以某种相互作用的、复杂的方式共同对学习产生影响。基于这两个方面的因素,第二语言的学习可归纳为"创造性构建"和"技能训练"两种模式,后者是大部分教学所采取的模式,而这两种不同的"下意识"习得和"有意识"学习的模式又是以某种方式互为补充的。

第七章"运用第二语言"从学习者对第二语言的运用这一侧面来描述第二语言学习的特点。因为语言的具体运用既是学习的目的也是学习的手段。所以应对学习者语言的可变性、语误和交际补偿策略的使用等客观现象加以分析,正确对待。

第八章"教与学"作为结尾部分,根据前面各章所讨论的内容,对第二语言教学实践提出了几点启示,即:学习可能是有意识进行的也可能是下意识进行的;有效的学习并非完全依赖于重复性训练;学习者往往具有一套自然的语言习得程序;学习者可以通过自己并非完备的语言知识体系完成交际任务;第二语言学习是受到复杂的心理因素制约的。

本书客观性和实用性的特点鲜明。考虑到第二语言学习的研究尚处在初级阶段,作者尽可能对各种理论进行了客观的介绍和归纳,并在此基础上为读者勾勒出一幅整体的关于第二语言学习的过程和特点的画面。尤其重要的是,作者没有停留在只对各种理论进行描述的层面上,而是强调了理论对实践的指导。他的观点是:虽然第二语言习得的研究尚未成熟,但现有的有关研究和理论对我们的课堂教学实践具有重要的指导意义;这些研究成果也为我们进一步探索第二语言教学指明了方向。在目前已有的教学方法和手段的基础上,语言习得的本质和学生在语言学习过程中各自与众不同的特点以及他们的主观能动角色应该受到充分的重视和研究。

本书涉及内容广泛,但又紧扣主题,且论述简明扼要,内容结构严谨周密,语言通俗易懂。书中各章均含有明确的论述目的和总结。书的结尾部分根据每一章所涉及的理论和研究思想提供了可供深入学习的书目,并且对这些书籍所述的内容作了点评,以帮助读者更加深入地探讨感兴趣的问题。

作为一部论述和介绍第二语言学习的入门参考书,要涉及的内容必然非常广泛,在力求具备上述特点的同时,本书很难对第二语言学习的理

论和实践研究成果做出详尽的描述和讨论。要彻底探讨和研究这些理论与实践结果,并走出适合我国国情的外语教学的路子来,还有赖于我们更深入地了解、学习和借鉴有关外语教学的各项研究成果和研究方法,立足于国内的教学实际,提高研究水平,加大研究步伐。毫无疑问,这本书可为我国广大外语工作者和学生提供一条快速了解、学习和实践外语教学研究成果的捷径。

Contents

Introduction

About the book

This book is an introduction to some of the discoveries and ideas which have emerged from recent research into foreign and second language learning. In writing the book, I have tried to concentrate especially on those aspects which seem likely to help us develop more effective approaches to teaching.

The distinction between *teaching* and *learning* needs no explanation: the former is carried out by the teacher and the latter by the learner. It is surprising, then, that it is only comparatively recently – since the early 1970s – that the distinction has aroused much interest in language-teaching circles. In most of the considerable literature that exists about classroom methods and techniques, the focus of attention is clearly on the activity of teaching, as if learning were merely a straightforward reflection of the teacher's actions. 'To learn' means, above all, to react to stimuli and instructions provided by the main actor in the classroom: the teacher.

What, then, has led people to look more closely at the other participants in the teaching-and-learning process? It is not within the scope of this book to offer a detailed analysis of developments. However, I would mention the following factors as being particularly influential:

1 In almost every sphere of education, there has been a growing tendency to become more 'learner-centred'. We have come to realise that each person is ultimately responsible for his own learning and needs to engage his own personality in the educational process.
2 In language teaching, our methods and techniques have often failed to produce effective learning, however sound they may have appeared in theory. To discover why, we must study the learner.
3 Related to the previous point, we have become increasingly aware that individual learners are different from each other. They are not simply soft clay, waiting to be shaped by the teacher, but have their own personalities, motivations and learning styles. All of these characteristics affect how learners act in the classroom.
4 The active role which learners perform in developing their language has also been emphasised by studies of first language acquisition. These

have led to similar work in foreign and second language learning which, again, has shown the learner to be an active participant in the developmental process.

The content of the present book relates mainly to points 3 and 4 above: the nature of language development, the learner's role in it, and the factors which influence it. The aim of the book relates mainly to point 2: to examine aspects of learning which might help us improve teaching.

Outline of the book

Chapter 1 discusses some of the studies and ideas about first language acquisition which have been influential in the field of second and foreign language learning.

Chapter 2 examines the habit-formation theories which were often dominant before this influence was felt.

Chapter 3 discusses learners' errors and what these might tell us about the internal processes which produce learning.

Chapter 4 looks at evidence that these processes dispose learners to master a language in predetermined sequences, which may conflict with our teaching sequences.

Chapter 5 considers why some people learn more successfully than others.

Chapter 6 tries to integrate some of the conclusions of previous chapters into a coherent picture of the learning experience.

Chapter 7 looks at some studies of how learners make use of a second or foreign language in order to communicate.

Chapter 8 suggests some ways in which recent evidence and ideas about learning may influence our approach to teaching.

At the end of the book, there are suggestions for further reading about many of the topics discussed in the book.

How some terms are used in the book

A distinction is often made between 'foreign' and 'second' language learning. Briefly, a 'second' language has social functions within the community where it is learnt (e.g. as a lingua franca or as the language of another social group), whereas a 'foreign' language is learnt primarily for contact outside one's own community. I agree that this is a useful distinction. However, I have not needed to maintain it during most of the discussion in this book, and have therefore used the term *second language* as a cover term for both 'foreign' and 'second' language.

Another distinction which is sometimes made is that between 'learning' and 'acquisition'. Learning refers to conscious processes for internalising a second language, whereas acquisition refers to subconscious processes. Again, I have not found it necessary to make the distinction systematically. In any case, our knowledge about what is conscious and what is subconscious in second language learning is too vague for us to use the distinction reliably. I have therefore decided to use *learning* as a cover term, except when the distinction is crucial to the immediate discussion. When discussing a child's *first* language, I have followed the common convention of using 'acquisition' more freely.

Some writers reserve the term 'learning strategy' for conscious efforts to internalise language, in contrast with subconscious 'learning processes'. For other writers, a learning strategy may be either conscious or unconscious. It is the second usage that I have followed in this book.

Finally, whenever I have needed to use a pronoun to refer to the nouns 'learner' and 'teacher', I have used 'he', 'him' or 'his'. This is purely a linguistic convention and does not imply that the person is more likely to be male than female.

1 First language acquisition

1.1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, research in first language acquisition has had an enormous influence on the study of second language learning, both at the theoretical and at the practical level.

At the theoretical level, researchers in first language acquisition have been working with exciting new ideas about language and the learning process. Concepts such as imitation and habit-formation have to a large extent been replaced by notions which emphasise the child's own creativity in constructing his knowledge of the language. These same ideas have stimulated researchers to view second language learning from a similar perspective and to seek out concrete evidence to support this view.

At the practical level, first language researchers have developed new techniques for collecting and analysing children's speech. These same techniques, together with others, have been used in the field of second language learning, to gather data and accumulate evidence about the sequences and processes that are involved.

With this narrowing of the gap between theories and methods in the two fields, it is not surprising that a recurrent theme has been to consider the similarities and differences between first and second language learning. Often, our increased knowledge of first language acquisition has served as a backcloth for perceiving and understanding new facts about second language learning. In addition, many researchers see their long-term goal as to produce a single 'theory of language acquisition', which would account for first and second language learning within one framework. After all, the two experiences are both manifestations of the general human capacity to learn and use language.

These are the main reasons, then, why the opening chapter in this book about second language learning is devoted to a survey of some recent work in *first* language learning.

1.2 First language acquisition and behaviourism

Before the 1960s, the study of child language was dominated mainly by the 'behaviourist' approach to language and learning. The best-known proponent of this approach was B. F. Skinner.

4

The title of one of Skinner's major books, *Verbal Behavior* (1957), captures the essence of the behaviourist approach to language. Language is not a mental phenomenon: it is behaviour. Like other forms of human behaviour, it is learnt by a process of habit-formation, in which the main components are:

1 The child *imitates* the sounds and patterns which he hears around him.
2 People recognise the child's attempts as being similar to the adult models and *reinforce* (reward) the sounds, by approval or some other desirable reaction.
3 In order to obtain more of these rewards, the child *repeats* the sounds and patterns, so that these become habits.
4 In this way the child's verbal behaviour is *conditioned* (or 'shaped') until the habits coincide with the adult models.

The habit-formation process is essentially the same as when a pigeon's behaviour is shaped, so that it pecks at the correct discs in order to obtain food.

Within this framework, the child's own utterances were not seen as possessing a system in their own right. They were seen as a faulty version of adult speech. The 'mistakes' were simply the result of imperfect learning: the process of habit-formation had not yet had time to run its full course.

1.3   Inadequacies of the behaviourist approach

The behaviourist view of first language acquisition was strongly challenged from the 1960s onwards, especially under the influence of Noam Chomsky's linguistic theories and cognitive psychology. These are some of the arguments which have convinced most researchers of the inadequacies of the behaviourist approach:

1 The basic view of language is no longer acceptable. Language is not merely 'verbal behaviour'. Underlying the actual behaviour that we observe, there is a complex system of rules. These enable speakers to create and understand an infinite number of sentences, most of which they have never encountered before.
   This creativity would not be possible if we had to rely on individual bits of learnt behaviour. It is only possible because we have internalised the underlying system of rules. The knowledge of these rules is our linguistic 'competence', which is different from the 'performance' that we can actually observe.
2 What children learn, then, is an abstract knowledge of rules (or 'competence'). However, this is not what they are exposed to: they are

exposed only to people's speech ('performance'). This process of extracting abstract knowledge from concrete examples cannot be explained by habit-formation.

3 Such an explanation becomes even less feasible if we consider that the rules are often reflected very indirectly in the actual surface structure of the speech. For example, the surface structure of *John is easy to please* looks identical to that of *John is eager to please*, yet their 'deep' structure is completely different: in the first, it is a question of other people pleasing John, whereas in the second, it is John himself who wants to do the pleasing. Such information about deep relationships could not be acquired simply by observing and imitating verbal behaviour.

4 The learning task is therefore a complex one. It is perhaps more complex than any other learning task that most human beings undertake. Yet it occurs at a very early age and with exceptional speed: by the age of between three and a half and five, normally-endowed children have internalised all the basic structures of their language. Again, this cannot be explained by habit-formation alone.

5 Although children are exposed to different actual speech, they arrive at the same underlying rules as other children in their community. The evidence also suggests that they pass through similar sequences in acquiring these rules. From the outset, children seem to be constructing their own rule-systems, which they gradually adapt in the direction of the adult system. This means that the child's language is not simply being shaped by external forces: it is being *creatively constructed* by the child as he interacts with those around him.

As we shall see later, this 'creative construction' hypothesis has also had considerable influence on people's theories about *second* language learning.

1.4   An innate language-learning capacity?

Factors such as those just discussed have led many people to believe that children are born with an innate capacity for acquiring language. To describe this capacity, the term 'Language Acquisition Device' (often shortened to LAD) was coined by researchers. Some characteristics of the LAD would be:

1 It is specific to the human species and never fails to operate in normal human beings, from infancy to about the age of eleven.

2 It gives children a means of processing the speech in the environment so that they can construct its underlying system.

3 To enable it to operate so quickly, it may already contain some of the 'universal' features which are found in all known languages, such as