

英语教学论

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前 言

本书是详细阐述英语教学理论的著作。近年来,国内出版了几种英语教学理论方面的著作,但针对高职高专英语专业的教学实践,有的过于偏重理论,有的过于艰涩,有很多不适宜的地方。

本著作汲取了国内外语言教学理论方面的重要研究成果,是为高职高专英语专业学生,英语教师及准备参加英语教师证书考试的朋友编写的英语教学指导著作。本书内容翔实,论述严谨,深入浅出,注重实用,并能站在语言教学的前沿,将语言教学与语言理论密切结合,对当前英语教学的理论与实践进行了全方位的论述、分析和介绍。

本书强调以下特点:强调借鉴其他相关学科,如教育学、心理学、社会学等领域的研究成果,认为英语作为第二语言的教学包含一些教育领域最为复杂的问题;语言教学要注重技能培养与运用,教师要创造性地组织教学活动;英语教学中要考虑学生因素,学习任务要容易并有趣;要让学生大量接触语言信息,让学生多投入活动,活动要交际化。

本书由七台河职业学院廉桂凤、河南省财经学校祁俊然、鹤岗师范高等专科学校杨莉担任主编。编写分工如下:廉桂凤编写了第1,2,3,4,14章(10.2万字);祁俊然编写了第5,6,8,9,12章(10.2万字);杨莉编写了第7,10,11,13章(10万字)。全书由廉桂凤统稿。

鉴于编者水平有限,书中难免有不妥之处,恳请读者不吝赐教。

作 者

2008年12月

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Chapter One Being a Good Language Teacher

Aims

In this unit we are going to discuss the following questions:

- a. How do we learn languages?
- b. What are the common views on language?
- c. What are the common views on language learning?
- d. What are the qualities of a good language teacher?
- e. How can one become a good language teacher?

1 How do we learn languages?

Much of human behavior is influenced by personal experiences. The way language teachers teach in the classroom is to some extent influenced by the way they learned languages. This is especially true in foreign language teaching. Before we discuss language learning theories, let's first reflect on our own language learning experiences.

Task

Below is a questionnaire on how your classmates learned a foreign language. Write down your own responses. Then interview three other students in your class and put their responses after Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3 accordingly. Analyze and compare the responses you have gathered.

The following are the questions for action research:

- (1) How many foreign languages can you speak?
- (2) Did you find learning a foreign language easy?
- (3) What difficulties did you experience? Why?
- (4) Which skills did you find more difficult to learn?
- (5) Did you focus on knowledge or skills? Why?
- (6) Why did you learn the foreign language(s)?
- (7) Did you find it interesting to learn the foreign language(s)?
- (8) What were your most common learning activities?
- (9) Did you like the way you learned the foreign language(s)?

After you have gathered and analyzed the responses, compare your findings from your research with the following findings from our investigation.

From the result of the above task, you may have found that:

- a. people learn languages for different reasons;
- b. people learn languages in different ways;
- c. people have different understandings about language learning;
- d. people have different capabilities in language learning.

Thus the challenge the language teacher is confronted with is how teaching methodology can cater for learners who have more differences than commonalities.

2 Views on language

One question that all approaches of language teaching should answer is “what is language?” The answer to this question is the basis for syllabus design, teaching methods, teaching procedures in the classroom, and even the techniques used in the class. Different views on language generate different teaching methodologies.

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 half century, no authoritative answer has been given to “What is language?” Rather, people talk about views of language, seemingly allowing for or accepting different theories for the moment. However, language teachers clearly need to know generally what sort of entity they are dealing with and how the particular language they are teaching fits into that entity (Brown, 1994a).

In the past half century, language teaching and learning practices have been influenced by three different views of language, namely, **the structural view**, **the functional view** and **the interactional view**.

The structural view sees language as a linguistic system made up of various subsystems: from phonological, morphological, lexical, etc. to sentences. 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.

The functional view sees language as a linguistic system but also as 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. 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 concept of present, past & future time; the expressions of certainty and possibility; the roles of agent and instrument within a sentence; and special relationships between people and objects.

The interactional view considers language as 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 one wants to do involves also knowing whether it is appropriate to do so, and where, when and how it is appropriate to do it. In order to know this, the learner has to study the patterns and rules of language above the sentence level to learn how language is used in different speech contexts.

The understanding of the nature of language may provide the basis for a particular teaching method (), but more importantly, it is closely related to the understanding of language learning. If language is considered to have a finite number of structural items, learning the language probably means learning these items. If language is more than just a system of structures, it is more importantly a tool, then to learn the language means to use it, rather than just study what it is and how it is formed. The next section summarizes some current theories about language learning.

3 Views on language learning

The 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?

Task

Work in groups of four. Brainstorm the answers to the two questions stated above. When you are ready, join another group and share your ideas.

Although these two questions have never been satisfactorily answered, a vast amount of research has been done from all aspects, which can be broadly divided into process-oriented theories and condition-oriented theories.

Process-oriented theories are concerned with how the mind processes new information, such as habit formation, induction, making inference, hypothesis testing and generalization. **Condition-oriented theories** emphasize the nature of the human and physical context in which language learning takes place, such as the number of students, what kind of input learners receive, and the learning atmosphere.

Some researchers attempt to formulate teaching approaches directly from these theories. For example, and 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, who applied of conditioning to the way humans acquire language (Harmer 1983). Based on their experiments, 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 “ou can train an animal to do anything (within reason) if you follow a certain procedure which has three major stages, stimulus, response, and reinforcement” (Harmer 1983:30).

Based on the theory of conditioning, suggested 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 America. 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 's reaction to 's behaviourist theory, which led to the revival of structural linguistics. The key point of '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, 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 rules an infinite number of sentences can be produced. A language learner acquires language competence which enables him to produce language.

Though 's theory is not directly applied in language teaching, it has had a great 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 still pretty much in the dark as to what language is and how language is learned, it is believed that a general knowledge about language and language learning will help language teachers do a better job.

4 What is a good language teacher?

Some teachers with an excellent command of a foreign language cannot teach the language well. However, some teachers with a general command of the language

can teach it very well. What do you think might account for this phenomenon?

It is clear that whether someone can become a good foreign language teacher does not solely depend on his/her command of the language. There are a variety of elements that contribute to the qualities of a good language teacher. These elements can be categorized into three groups: ethic devotion, professional qualities and personal styles ().

Task

Ethic devotion, professional qualities and personal styles jointly contribute to the making of a good English teacher. All the adjectives in the box below in Task 5 could be used to characterize these three aspects.

1. Work in groups of four and decide which adjectives describe ethic devotion, which describe personal styles and which describe professional qualities. Please write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

2. Add any adjectives to the list which describe further qualities that you feel are missing.

3. These adjectives are intended to describe positive qualities or styles. Do you feel that any of them could have a negative side as well? If yes, in what way? For example, an authoritative teacher may make the students feel assured, but he/she may also make the student less free to disagree with him/her.

kind

dynamic

authoritative

speaking clearly

creative

patient

well - informed

hardworking

resourceful

attentive

warm - hearted

well - prepared

flexible
intuitive
accurate
enthusiastic
humourous
caring
disciplined
professionally – trained

(Adapted from Parro 1993)

From the above activities we can see that a good English teacher should have ethic devotion, certain desirable personal styles, and more importantly, he or she should have necessary professional qualities. These three aspects constitute the professional competence of a good English teacher. A person who has a good command of English is not necessarily a good teacher because he/she might have only one of the elements of professional competence.

It is assumed that all responsible English teachers have ethic devotion, and they are supposed to make their personal styles compatible with their work. These two aspects, which are beyond the scope of this book, can be achieved as long as the teacher himself has the willingness to do so.

A question that many teachers often ask is: I like my job, and I love the students, but how can I become a good English teacher? Our answer is that you need professional competence, which we are going to discuss in the next section.

5 How can one become a good language teacher?

The most important and most difficult part of the making of a good language teacher is the development of professional competence, which is the state or quality of being adequately qualified for the profession, and armed with a specific range of skills, strategies, knowledge, and ability.

Task

All the following statements could be used to describe what an English teacher should do in order to develop professional competence. Do you agree with them? What else do you think an English teacher should do in order to develop professional

competence? Add them in the table and share your ideas with your partner.

Statements

1. He should learn from other experienced teachers as an apprentice.
2. He should accumulate experience from his own teaching practice.
3. He should receive training in teaching methodology.
4. He should study applied linguistics.
5. He should perfect his own command of English.
6. He should go to foreign countries to learn from native speakers.
7. He should study subjects like education, psychology, etc.
8. He should observe other teachers teaching.

A language teacher's professional competence is much more difficult than a driver's skill to handle a car, and is more complicated than a student's competence of speaking a foreign language. It involves more factors and longer learning time, and may never be really finished.

Some people think teaching is a craft; that is, a novice teacher can learn the profession by imitating the experts' techniques, just like an apprentice. Others hold the view that teaching is an applied science, based on scientific knowledge and experimentation. By making a compromise between these two views, uses a "reflective model" to demonstrate the development of professional competence. The following model is an adapted version.

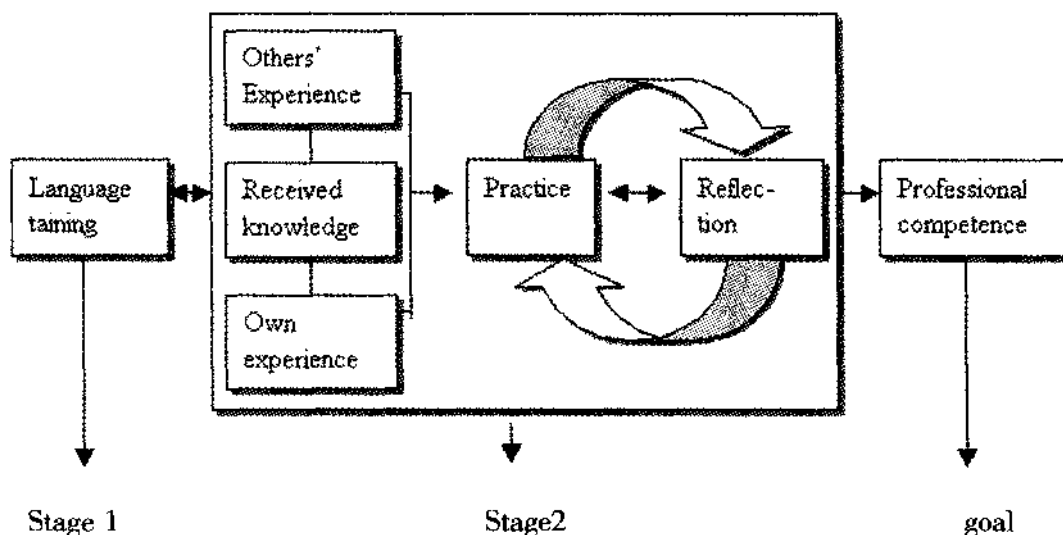


Figure 1.1 Reflective model for the development of teachers' professional competence

(Adapted from 1991:15)

From the above model, we can see the development of professional competence for a language teacher involves Stage 1, Stage 2, and Goal. The first stage is language training. All English teachers are supposed to have a sound command of English. Of course, language is always changing so language training can never come to an end.

The second stage seems to be more complicated because it involves three sub-stages: learning, practice, and reflection. The learning stage is actually the specific preparation that a language teacher should make before they go to practice. This preparation can be:

- (1) learn from others' experience (empirical knowledge)
- (2) learn received knowledge (such as language theories, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, educational psychology, language teaching methodology, etc.)
- (3) learn from one's own experience

Both experiential knowledge (others' and one's own) and received knowledge are useful when the teachers go to practice. This is the combination of "raft" and "applied science". The learning stage is followed by practice. The term "practice" can be used in two senses. In one sense, it is a short period of time assigned for student teachers to do teaching practice as part of their education, usually under the supervision of their instructors. This practice is also called pseudo practice. The other sense of "practice" is the real work that the teacher undertakes when he finishes his education.

Teachers benefit from practice if they keep on reflecting on what they have been doing (Stanley 1999). It should be noted that teachers reflect on their work not only after they finish a certain period of practice, but also while they are doing the practice.

When the student teachers are doing pseudo practice, they are aware that they are trying out what they have learned and they are likely to reflect on their work, because their instructors require them to do so. The pseudo practice is beneficial only if they are serious about the reflection. The most difficult thing to do is to keep

on reflecting on their work when teachers are doing practice in the “real work” sense.

After some period of practice and reflection, a teacher matures and approaches the Goal. In Figure 1.1, professional competence is at the right end, meaning it is the ultimate goal. But actually it is not. Professional competence is “a moving target or horizon, towards which professionals travel all their professional life but which is never finally attained.” (Wallace 1991:58)

Review

- (1) What are the aims of this unit?
- (2) What are the four major differences among people concerning learning a foreign language?
- (3) What is the structural view of language?
- (4) What is the functional view of language?
- (5) What is the interactional view of language?
- (6) Language learning theories underlying an approach or method usually attempt to address two dimensions: processes and conditions. Explain them.
- (7) Give a brief account of the behaviorist theory of language learning.
- (8) Give a brief account of the cognitive theory of language learning.
- (9) Try to explain why some teachers with an excellent command of English cannot teach English well.
- (10) What are the three groups of elements that contribute to the qualities of a good language teacher?
- (11) What are Parrot's 20 adjectives for the description of the positive qualities of a good language teacher?
- (12) What are the 8 statements about what an English teacher should do in order to develop professional competence?
- (13) What is Wallace's “reflective model” for the development of professional competence?
- (14) What is your understanding of the differences and commonalities among learners of a foreign language?
- (15) Is it possible to cater for the learners who have different learning styles