

Second Language Acquisition Approaches with Respect to Cognitive Learning Styles

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Abstract

Language teachers need to evaluate the effectiveness of the different types of teaching methods by taking into consideration the various cognitive learning styles particular to their students. Each method requires the learners to think and act in different ways. Therefore, students would prefer to learn through certain methods depending on their cognitive learning styles. Various language acquisition methods with respect to cognitive learning styles will be discussed.

KEY WORDS: *Cognitive learning styles, Second language acquisition*

Various language teaching methods have developed over a long period of time, reflecting the changing views of how language is acquired. Therefore, language teachers should evaluate the effectiveness of the various methods developed, taking into account specific factors and cognitive styles. Language learners will increase their success of learning another language depending upon the language teaching approach used.

When the predominant approach to learning involved huge amounts of memorization, translation and recitation, the *grammar-translation* method was the most popular approach for acquiring second language skills. At that time, learning another language meant being able to read and translate literature and to know grammatical rules. The amount of knowledge ABOUT the language measured successful language acquisition.

Students most likely to succeed with this method take the intellectual approach by viewing language as another subject for them to analyze. Being field independent enables the learners to concentrate on the literal translation and focus on minute details. Those language learners that acquire the intellectual grasp of the grammatical structures tend to think systematically. After extensive reflection, they arrive at a decision. Perseverance is necessary when trying to understand the logic of the grammar through deductive reasoning. These learners tend not to tolerate ambiguity. Accuracy in translating reflects the learners' success in second language acquisition.

In the process of converting one language into another, oral comprehension and production in the second language are neglected. Students rarely speak the language in class. There are very limited opportunities to express their own ideas. The grammar-

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translation method would suit introverted individuals especially when “the language learned is usually of a literary type, and the vocabulary is detailed and sometimes esoteric.” (Rivers, 1981, p. 31) In the classroom, attention is focused on the teacher, so students are dependent on teacher input. The grammar-translation method is most useful and successful to individuals motivated to acquire a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals. It is not essential to speak up, especially since the highest priority is acquiring reading and writing skills in the second language. Language learners who would be too embarrassed when pronouncing anything alone and more analytical in their thought processes would be successful candidates in second language acquisition using the grammar-translation method.

The *direct* method, unlike the grammar-translation method, requires active participation in class utilizing the target language. The theory behind this method is that first and second language learning are the same. The learners should be able to learn another language in the same way a child learns his native language. Therefore, the teacher doesn't refer to the native language.

In the classroom using the direct method approach, the teacher creates a stimulating natural environment for learning the target language. Students first direct their attention to hearing the target language and then trying to speak it. Accurate pronunciation of target sounds is emphasized. Therefore, these students must be able to discriminate target sounds and be willing to reproduce and practice them without inhibition. Also essential for success in language acquisition is “to seek direct comprehension by inferring meanings of unknown elements from the context rather than by seeking equivalents in a bilingual vocabulary list.” (Rivers, 1981, p. 33) The language learners tolerate ambiguity when inducing functional grammar rules. To improve the students' level of proficiency, the teacher encourages spontaneous utterances despite grammatical errors.

Individuals most likely to attain proficiency using this method take advantage of the relatively unstructured situation by trying to express themselves in the target language. They are learning from the context. Being field independent enables the language learners to be more inductive, which affects creativity in oral production. It is more important to grasp the general idea of what the teacher says and then respond. As a result, the direct approach would be satisfactory to the language learners most interested in practical usage of a language and rewarding to those who can learn by induction.

Although the direct method also emphasizes oral production, *audio-lingual* techniques aim to provide the students with instant responses in the new language. Chastain says that when people use a language, they are not able to think about the grammatical structures at the same time. Therefore, in the audio-lingual method, mimicry-memorization and structural pattern drilling serve as oral exercises and reinforcement. With continuous practice, the active students supposedly learn to handle the language unconsciously. After establishing automatic responses to oral or written stimuli, then the learners should be able to gain command over written skills successfully.

Success in using the audio-lingual method requires active participation between students and teacher, although this situation does not mean REAL communication is necessarily achieved. Extroverted and assertive students will seem to be more proficient because of the emphasis on speaking, but introverted, reflective students are penalized, especially in oral production.

However, choral drills, for example, allow inhibited students to feel more confident rather than to become embarrassed from speaking aloud. From the beginning, students learn complete utterances directly useful in conversations. As a result, language learners feel a sense of accomplishment. Learners with integrative motivation would like the audio-lingual method, at least initially, because of the useful phrases immediately presented.

Students who want to be certain of the meaning in everything they say would find the audio-lingual approach inadequate for second language acquisition because of the lack of explanations or explanations delayed until after the oral practices. This method seems appropriate especially for children who will easily mimic anything without needing to analyze the grammatical structure first. Often, children's text books have chants and songs with repetitive phrases because children love to mimic. However, highly analytical students find the dialogues artificial and drills mechanical. Students who like rote repetition find the audio-lingual method satisfactory for second language acquisition.

For those students who find the audio-lingual method ineffective, the *cognitive code-learning* approach may be the answer. This method requires that new grammatical structures are introduced first, prior to the use of the structure. Based on the theory that competence precedes performance, grammar explanations and exercises are taught first, followed by application. Knowledge is acquired through active mental participation, implying that students must be aware of what they are learning meaningfully, unlike the audio-lingual method.

This cognitive code-learning approach emphasizes that the mind processes the information obtained. Students learn the meaningful functions of language. They analyze as well as utilize the language because "the meaning resides in syntactical relationships and is expressed in semantic and phonological components." (Chastain, 1971, p. 131) In the cognitive code-learning approach, the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—are presented at the same time. This form of teaching reflects the total picture of communication. Students with integrative motivation would adhere to the cognitive code-learning approach because of the global perspective of second language acquisition. This approach would be more suitable for more field independent adults because adults are able to use more monitoring strategies. They need to be systematic as well as intuitive thinkers.

Cognitive code-learning allows opportunities for innovative and creative language formation. Students who are assertive and reflective will gain advantage when practicing the target language in a demanding situation. There are few classroom drills that

actually teach the functional use of grammatical patterns as opposed to the verbatim regurgitation of material. To be successful in language learning, these students need to have more self-esteem so that they will not feel ashamed of making mistakes. It is the meaningful level of language that the cognitive code-learning approach stresses.

The *silent way* is also concerned with meaningful communication and self expression. Students inductively analyze the teacher's output and then contribute to the class when they feel ready. Also, relationships among the students and between the teacher and students must be at ease in order for genuine communication to occur. The silent way has therefore almost eliminated teacher intervention in order for individual learning strategies to develop. This technique allows students to say more and more based on their own inner criteria. Students with high self-esteem and assertiveness will benefit from the silent way. They must be able to pick up the language cues and then produce them in order to communicate with others.

However, the students also need to be patient and persevering in order to learn a language through the silent way. The students' initial encounter with the language is inductive. In addition, acquiring the language is the students' responsibility. But since the students assume the responsibility for their own learning, they also receive the credit for what they learn. The teacher guides the students but the students judge for themselves what is correct and incorrect. Also, the students must be able to tolerate ambiguity and be analytical and reflective until they can understand the teacher's input. Therefore, the silent way is very time-consuming and highly self-monitoring. The students most likely to succeed are self-motivating adults desiring to learn functional grammar and speech.

The *community language learning* approach places much emphasis on students working as a supportive interacting group. In this model of education, students are now referred to as clients and the teacher becomes the counselor. The language learners control the learning environment to eliminate defensive learning. Allowing the clients to choose the type of conversation is an attempt to overcome fear of teacher dominance. The community language learning approach tries to create the best environment conducive for learning.

Language learners in a community language learning setting must provide guidance and motivation for language acquisition. Because the teacher (counselor) is non-directive, the learners (clients) must be supportive but assertive. Instead of featured pattern drills, students choose what they want to learn and say. Learning functional grammar by induction necessitates some tolerance of ambiguity and field independence. Successful language learners need to be capable of perceiving grammatical structures in order to utilize them to express their ideas or opinions. Because the students are responsible for what they want to learn, the interest and motivation in learning must be high. Personal freedom to choose learning material accommodates for the affective factors of language acquisition.

Since affective variables and a humanistic environment seem to contribute much

to language acquisition according to the community language approach, the learners with an empathetic personality will be able to establish a non-threatening environment. Patience is necessary so that anxiety and tension are reduced. Individuals must be willing to communicate their own personal feelings and opinions. In order for meaningful exchanges to occur, these individuals need self-confidence even though the environment is supposed to minimize identity crises from occurring. As a result, individual language proficiency reflects group interaction as well as personal input in the community language learning methodology.

There are various methods used in second language learning. However, the success of language acquisition depends on the personality of the students, the teacher, and the class as a whole. The roles and responsibilities of the language learners and teacher also determine which method would be the best for them to use. By evaluating old methods and exploring new methods, language learners and teachers can work together to better understand the process of second language acquisition and to increase success in language learning.

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