



The Effect And Influence Of Language Teaching Methodology Informed By Theory Acquisition

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Abstract

With the globalization of the world, language teaching becomes more important than ever before, and many universities and classroom teachers are active to explore the most efficient and effective methodology to teach languages to achieve a desirable result. When they seek to improve the quality of language teaching, they often research teaching methodologies by referring to general theories about language and language learning. Theoretical bases and teachers' hands-out experience have informed methodologies of language teaching, and methods of language teaching have been improved with the developments about linguistics, psychology and education. But there is a question which extent the information that theory has made available can be used to explore language teaching methodology and of the relevance of theory to language teaching methodology.

Ellis [1] explains that there has been very little consideration of how second language acquisition can be utilized in language teaching methodology, and Ellis also mentions that researchers do not apply their work to language teaching. In general, the theory that researchers have found out mainly focuses on how languages are learned, and how language itself is constructed. Researchers are concerned with areas of relevance to methodology, for example input or interaction, and they often devote themselves to the study of linguistics and psychology. Therefore, theory has nothing to tell teachers about what to teach but serves as a guide on how to teach. In contrast, teaching methodology is concerned with practical knowledge. Practitioners try to design the most effective way and procedure to teach languages. Theory may or may not lead to an efficient methodology.

There is a gap between the theory and methodology. The crucial issue of the gap is the relationship between technical and practical knowledge. Ellis [2] mentions 'that of the outsider-insiders for an applied linguist is not a practitioner of language pedagogy but rather someone who looks at language pedagogy from the vantage point of knowledge gleaned from technical source. It is clear that why some theories are questioned irrelevant to practice by practitioners and cannot inform methodology completely. According to Ellis, technical knowledge does not supply specific directions and may not be considered to be of use in teaching methodology, especially in classroom activities. Therefore, 'the lack of connection between academic research and teachers' instruction cannot guarantee methodology [3].

But on the other hand, it cannot be assumed that theory has no function to practice. Theory plays an important role because it provides teachers with a theoretic basis for methodology in general. Theories about language offer a framework that may motivate a particular teaching method, such as Audiolingualism. Theories about learning underlie an approach or method about psycholinguistic processes involved in learning and conditions needing to be met about the learning processes. [4]

The theory of instructed second language acquisition is based on whether it is helpful to solve the problem of teaching knowledge, for example teaching grammar effectively in the classroom context, and two primary distinctions between implicit and explicit language learning. Classroom language learning is different from the way in which language learning is obtained naturally; this needs teachers' instruction. Teachers make their effort to organise input into students. The activities and steps that teachers adopt in the classroom directly influence students' learning level. Therefore, teachers face the problem of how to design language teaching. From this point of view, the theory of instructed second language acquisition makes its research relating to solving the problem mainly on two aspects. One is to improve students' ability to use the language instead of learning the knowledge of linguistics. For teachers, the purpose of instruction is to enhance students' ability of using the language. The other one is that the theory considers the form-focused instruction. Although this idea is not up-to-date, the form-focused instruction is vital for teachers to make learners progressive. [5]

Is the research of the theory relevant to language teaching methodology or how much can they inform it? The results of the research of the theory are not concerning specific actions and procedures about language teaching but rather explanations and statements of designing that will work well. They are ways of explaining the theoretical hypothesis and will offer practitioners with instruction to adopt

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relating methods to facilitate the problems of language learning. In this sense, the theory has relevant information to methodology.

Drawn on the theory of instructed second language acquisition, two proposals about language teaching methodology are advanced: the structural syllabus and grammar tasks. They arise from the traditional ones. The traditional structural syllabus serves as a basis of Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching. Grammar tasks can be found in Audiolingualism. Traditional approaches face a number of problems, but still inform some methodologies.

The traditional structural syllabus used in the Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching is directed at implicit knowledge. According to Richards and Rodgers[6], the starting point of Audiolingualism method is a linguistic syllabus about phonetics. In addition, a lexical syllabus of basic vocabulary is added. The language skills are taught in the order of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The basis of structural syllabus is based on the idea that each item will be fully learned and grasped before another item is taught. The syllabus of Audiolingualism is not proper, because mastery of a part of knowledge needs a long time and each item will be partly grasped. For Situational Language Teaching, a structural syllabus is a list of the basic sentence patterns of language arranged according to their presentation. In situational language teaching, structures are always taught with sentences and vocabulary chosen according to the way in which sentence pattern is taught. This kind of syllabus is not a situational syllabus because it cannot offer situations and the language associated with them. Moreover, the situation refers to the exercises of sentence pattern. These two traditional structural syllabuses are inadequate, because they cannot provide a satisfactory solution to the learners' problem. They are based on the need for practise to develop fully implicit knowledge.

The new notion of a structural syllabus develops a synthetic teaching plan and bases on the assumption that grammar teaching will be the most effective. The different parts of language are taught step by step and became harder and harder until the language acquisition can be gained. The syllabus needs a course designer to decide what to be taught and which order to be arranged. Besides, it can serve as a basis for the development of implicit and explicit knowledge. For implicit knowledge, the aim of syllabus is to teach knowledge in the course of communication. For explicit knowledge, the aim is to teach linguistic knowledge and to develop learners' awareness of grammatical structures. However, the structural syllabus is the proposal, which has limited research support. Ellis thinks that second language acquisition studies cannot make the general proposal valid for the classroom context in which teachers work. The teacher should research to try out the proposals in their own classrooms to test whether they will work.

Another proposal drawn on the theory of instructed second language acquisition is acquisition-compatible grammar tasks. The grammar teaching involves not only concentrating learners' attention on a targeted structure in the input and enabling them to understand meanings, but also developing learners' explicit knowledge of targeted structures by ways of direct explanation. The proposal is compatible with how learners learn grammar and explains that second language acquisition can be much more influenced by understanding input. This requires the use of interpretation tasks that first allows learners to notice the specific grammatical part in the input, then identify and understand the meanings words convey, and in the end grasp it. It is based on comprehension-based grammar instruction. [7]

Theory is important for language teaching and can offer information to methodology. On the basis of proposals derived from the theory of second language acquisition and my own experience, I can find some useful methods to language teaching compared with my precious procedures.

I gained inspiration about grammar teaching. In my English teaching, I prefer to use the form-focused instruction when I teach grammar. I focus on the main points of grammar and follow the instruction in detail, from definition to conditions of using, to the paradigm of words, to sentence patterns and to questions to be noticed. All the relevant knowledge about a certain part of grammar is taught completely for one or two classes. After teaching, more exercises are given to do in the classroom to examine whether the grammar is mastered, and error corrections are given promptly. I use this teaching method especially for adult students. From the feedback of students, I know that they understand the knowledge about grammar in the classroom, and questions are produced consequently. The knowledge is easily forgotten and students do not grasp it fully by understanding. My teaching method is not compatible with the knowledge about principles of theories about language and language teaching, although my students and I like the method.

Now, I have changed my mind, understood the process of learning, and learned how to teach explicit and implicit knowledge. Learners should be required to process the structure, not to produce it. The activities in tasks are followed to require first attention to meaning, then noticing the form and function of the grammatical structure, and finally error identification. I am also informed that comprehensive input is important and students should be provided with as much comprehensive input as possible. For

example, when I teach plural form, first I will let my students listen to a sentence 'I have three brothers', then they understand the meaning and go on to notice that brothers is plural in meaning without noticing the -s morpheme, and finally identify the grammatical structure. When I teach new words and sentence structures, I will ask students to act according to my sentence. I will follow the steps to teach the word of dictionary: Ming, put your dictionary in your left hand; Gang, hand your dictionary to your neighbour; Tian, show me your dictionary. The method is valid to help students master the words and sentences easily.

On the part of designing the syllabus, I should be aware of the problem whether it is suitable for learners to learn the knowledge they will be taught at different stages. As a rule in my experience, for English beginners, I always teach them phonetic symbols first, because I think it is helpful for students to recite new words and pronounce words by themselves. This syllabus designing cannot solve the problem of facilitating intake. On the other hand, I follow the method of Audiolingualism. I personally feel that all knowledge should be completely mastered before another item is taught. In fact, mastery happens in the long term and the knowledge should be taught gradually. Drawn on from it, when I teach an item of grammar, I can divide it into different parts to teach, follow the instruction from easy to hard, and focus on the input, not on the production. For example, to teach the simple future tense, as usual, I teach be going to, will (shall), be plus present participle, be to, be about and the present tense expressing future tense at one time. In the future, I will teach the simple form and then step by step to teach the rest. Besides, every time when I teach the rest, I should revise the part that I have taught.

In summary, theory can contribute to language teaching methodology. It provides theoretic bases for language and language learning, and also shows some implications to methodology. Language teaching cannot take place without a theory. But it must be clearly acknowledged for language teaching, as Ellis believes that theory does not constitute a body of knowledge that is necessary for the development of teaching methods. The language teaching methodology is informed not only by purely theoretical development, but also by the practical hands-on experience of classroom teachers. Efficient and effective teaching methods require teachers' practical experience on the basis of students' reaction and knowledge.

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References

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