Toward a Theory of Teaching a Foreign Language
as
a
School Subject*

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Introduction

For a long time FL teaching has been strongly influenced by the theories of related disciplines. In fact, the history of FL teaching is the history of related sciences influencing FL teaching. In the 19th century, a new science, phonetics, was developed and subsequently its theory and practice was introduced into the field of FL teaching. This new science functioned as a trigger for a FL teaching reform movement, called the "Direct Method Movement," which stresses the oral aspect of language and the use of the target language in the classroom. The introduction of phonetics into FL teaching helped FL teachers examine FL teaching in a new perspective and modernize it.

In the 1940's descriptive structural linguistics was brought to the forefront in FL teaching as a powerful new contribution. As a result, structural linguistics, along with the then-current behaviorist theory of learning, made a great contribution theoretically and practically to the advance of FL teaching. Especially the concepts of phonemes, grammatical patterns and contrast (minimal pairs) gave a deep insight into the clearer understanding of the target language and contributed to the task of specifying teaching goals for a FL course.

In the 1960's, structural linguistics came under serious attack in linguistic circles and replaced by generative-transformational linguistics. Consequently structural linguistics has faded away to a large degree from the field of FL teaching. However, generative linguistics, contrary to expectation, can not or does not try to give a lending hand to FL teachers. Psycholinguistics, which is in line with generative linguistics, is offering some of its implications and applications to FL teachers. Of course this can be evaluated to some extent, but thus far its results would not only be unknown but also unconfirmed.

Another, current, disciplinary influence on FL teaching comes from the field of learning psychology, especially from cognitive learning theorists. The idea of cognitive learning theory has been influential on curriculum studies in general, and this influence has come gradually into FL teaching, suggesting the relative importance of interrelationships between the components of teaching material.

The above brief review of the history of FL teaching shows us that FL teaching has always been affected by related disciplines. It is certain that those disciplines greatly contributed to the improvement of FL teaching, but these influences tended to be rather superficial

for the simple reason that FL teachers did not have a clear idea for a criterion or stand on which their assessment of these informations could be based. With the influx of so much new and pertinent data and methods, the FL teacher was increasingly in need of a solid ground from which he might evaluate and implement his teaching. In fact, it seems many FL teachers blindly pursued new theoretical trends from one extreme to another without firmly establishing their own stand.

FL teachers urgently need to establish a criterion or a frame of reference for FL teaching. Based on this framework, they need to examine every possible interdisciplinary idea, make assumptions, experiment, verify, and put their findings into practice. In this sense, establishing a frame of reference for FL teaching should be the basis of scientific study toward the establishment of FL teaching as an independent discipline.

Basis of FL Teaching Study

Establishing fundamental criteria as guiding principles for curriculum construction has been a proposition which is of primary concern to the specialists of curriculum studies. A fundamental aim of curriculum studies is to select, arrange and organize the wealth of our cultural heritage, i.e., the contents of science, art, etc. in order for students to understand easily, and by so doing contribute to the formation of their character. In other words, its aim is to transform cultural heritage into educationally relevant values.

With this in mind, specialists in curriculum studies have committed themselves to one of two basic frameworks of curriculum construction. One approach attempts to assess cultural inheritance from the criterion of science based on the logic of science in which the contents of a "parent science"[1] are introduced in a condensed form. The other approach, chiefly developed by John Dewy, selects and organizes teaching materials according to the framework of a pupil's social development.

The approach based on the principle of logic in science is not as relevant to the goal of general education as it might seem. First of all, the goal of general education at the elementary, or junior high level, is not to train a specialist in science or in the arts, but rather to cultivate a general understanding of our world, both physically and socially. Secondly, if curriculum is supposed to be based on the logic of parent sciences, how can we explain why some sciences such as physics and geography, are included as school subjects in a junior high or elementary school while others like anthropology and psychology are not? If we pursue the logic of science as a curriculum principle, we have to introduce all sciences as junior high or elementary school subjects, which will lead to an explosion of the school curriculum. For these reasons, the logic of science should be replaced by some other more relevant framework.

The idea of social development, on the other hand, goes to the opposite extreme, neglecting the logic of science. In this approach, not only is the logic of science completely

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1. A "parent science" is a science on which school subjects are based. A "parent science" of natural science which is taught at the elementary or junior high level, for instance, would be chemistry, physics, geography, etc.

neglected, but also, as in the case of the "core curriculum movement"[2] the ordered manner in which each particular subject is taught is shattered and a curriculum is reconstructed according to the student's social activities and development. In fact, with this approach social studies and mathematics are dealt with during the same period. Although, the core curriculum had an advantage of motivating pupils, this attempt failed as an experiment in conveying the fundamental content of our cultural wealth to pupils, and thus failed in helping build their character.

The main concern of curriculum studies specialists has become how to establish a new logic of subjects which can synthesize these mutually contradicting theses. They attempt to clarify the role played by each particular subject in the formation of individual character, and then attempt to find a principle for syllabus construction, and finally they try to systematize teaching materials and methods. It seems that too-very little attention has been paid to the educational problem of curriculum principle, more specifically, the principle of a FL course syllabus. For example, a FL is taught on the junior high level. As long as it is a junior high school subject, *it is necessary to place FL course within the framework of education in general*, i.e., to study its syllabus based on the whole picture of curriculum studies. That is to consider the educational aims peculiar to FL courses and principles of syllabus construction within the perspective of school education. This will give FL teachers a basic stand for consideration of foreign language teaching.

A starting point for the establishment of the original principle for the subject of FL would be to elucidate the nature of FL ability in the social environment: the mechanism of FL ability, the process of language acquisition, the effects of language ability on the student's personality construction, etc. If we place in this context any idea from related disciplines, and assess any idea from this viewpoint, we could maintain confidence in our assessment when faced with strong influences from outside disciplines. For the following several pages we will examine related disciplines from the viewpoint of FL ability.

American Structural Linguistics & TESOL

Thus far our consideration has been toward FL teaching in general, rather than the teaching of a particular foreign language. Hereafter, however, our concentration will be on the teaching of English as a foreign and/or second language, *per se*, TESOL.[3] To begin with, it was American structural linguistics founded by Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield which studied scientifically the structure of the ESOL ability. Structural linguistics attempted to analyze linguistic elements which constitute a language from the structural viewpoint. Based on this theoretical background, the late Dr. Charles C. Fries, for example, challenged the proposition, "What is it to know a language?", and arrived at the following conclusion. A person has "learned" a language when he has mastered the following set of linguistic items

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2. A curriculum reform movement was developed and stimulated by the Progressive Education Association during the 1930's. Its emphasis was on cooperative study of social problems by teachers and students.

3. TESOL stands for Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages and refers to TESL and/or TEFL.

within a limited vocabulary: (1) sound system consisting of segmental phonemes and suprasegmental phonemes, and (2) grammatical structure consisting of inflectional forms, function words and word order.[4]

The analytical study of English to be learned was cumulatively done, especially in the field of phonology, but, generally speaking, this analysis was not as successful in syntax and semantics as in phonology and morphology.

They assumed that we have mastered a foreign language when we have learned to respond automatically to the linguistic items. This idea was theoretically supported by the Skinnerian behavioristic theory of learning which is based on stimulus, response and reinforcement, the leading learning theory of those days. The theory of structural linguistics, combined with the Skinnerian learning theory, was developed into the well-known Audio-lingual (Habit) Theory, the most dominant TESOL method during the 1940's and 1950's in the U.S.A. and in the 1960's in Japan.

The undersirable results of this Method were not as limited as had been expected: the method is generally believed to be a failure and is being replaced by new linguistic and psychological theories. There might be several reasons for this. One of the most crucial reasons would be that it was a direct application of the "parent sciences" without any detailed examination and assessment of them from their own standpoint. In other words, linguistic and psychological theories were overgeneralized to every level and every aspect of TESOL. Although the ideas of the related sciences are relevant to the aims or goals of ESOL courses, their application will only be of limited value unless they are closely examined and specified into all the specific stages and aspects of TESOL.

Psycholinguistics & TESOL

Most recent psycholinguistic studies on language acquisition have been devoted to the description and interpretation of a child's developmental process of first-language acquisition. The Skinnerian, behavioristic view of language acquisition has been discarded and greater emphasis is being placed on the child's innate cognitive abilities as a language acquisition device. While the traditional behavioristic learning hypothesis is based on a bold assumption that human language learning could be achieved through the same processes by which rats, pigeons or dogs learn, i.e., by operant conditioning, the new cognitive-generative theorists reject this and take the stand that language is a species-specific behavior only a human inherits and has.

In the cognitive psycholinguist's view, a child does not learn his language merely by imitation, practice, reinforcement or generalizations, but rather acquires linguistic competence in a short period of time, developing his own hierarchical grammar which is different from the adult's grammar. Some characteristic features observed in the early speech of a very young child are, according to McNeill, called *telegraphic* and *holophrastic*. Just as we delete the less informative linguistic elements in telegrams so as to avoid redundancy, certain

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4. Chales C. Fries, *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (Michigan: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1945), p. 3.

elements are systematically eliminated in the child's speech. This phenomenon is called telegraphic speech. Take the sample speech of a 28-month-old child, articles, auxiliary verbs, copula verbs and inflections of every sort are missing.[5] This may be considered as a child's device to save space in memory.

Another characteristic, holophrastic speech appears even before the telegraphic speech period. A child's speech, though it may be impricise, has a possibility to convey complex ideas. Holophrastic refers to this possibility. There are three peculiar characteristics observed in it. (1) The utterances of holophrastic speech are often closely connected with action and action follows speech. (2) Holophrastic speech is often caused by emotion. The loudness of utterances, for example, may indicate disapproval and a soft voice approval. (3) Holophrastic speech refers to things. These characteristics are called conative, expressive and referential respectively. Holophrastic speech develops into patterned, telegraphic speech gradually around the age of 17 month.

The combination of words in telegraphic speech is not random as it may seem but is based on some definite principle. Every word a child has in its vocabulary around 18 month of age belongs to either of two form classes: pivot and open classes. The pivot class contains a small number of words such as *allgone, byebye, big, more, pretty, my, see, night-night, hi, that, two, etc.,* while the open class contains many more words such as *boy, sock, boat, fan, mild, plane, shoe, vitamins, hot, Mommy, daddy,* etc.[6] The open class is an open system quick to take in new words while the pivot class is a closed system. Words in the open class have a relatively high frequency of occurrence while those in the pivot class have a low frequency. Words in the open class can occur by themselves or in combination with words from the pivot class, while words in the pivot class can not occur alone. The combinations in which pivot and open-words appear are as the following:[7]

$$S \longrightarrow (P) + O$$

As the child's speech develops, the pivot class (P_1) is subdivided into more differentiated categories. First, P_1 is subdivided into Articles, Demonstrative Pronouns and a new pivot class (P_2). Subsequently P_2 is subdivided into Adjectives, Possessive Pronouns, and a new pivot class (P_3). Thus a child's grammar approaches the adult grammar. It is obvious that this development of differentiation is not the outcome of imitating the adult's utterance. Children classify words in a way that is consistent with the more subtle distinctions they have not yet drawn.[8]

The above brief examination of a child's progressive differentiation of the grammatical categories would be enough to persuade us to believe the validity of the cognitive theory of first-language acquisition. As far as the first-language acquisition theory is concerned, it seems impossible to deny the relative importance of the cognitive theory as compared

5. David McNeill, *The Acquisition of Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 19.

6. *Ibid.,* p. 26.

7. Leon A Jakobovits, *Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Issues* (Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1970), p. 9.

8. David McNeill, *The Acquisition of Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 59.

with the behaviorist theory.

This cognitive theory of first-language acquisition has recently influenced the theory and practices of TESOL. There are several reasons. According to Jakobovits: (1) the old Audiolingual Method was not successful; (2) the new TESOL theory appears to be a more correct description of natural language acquisition; (3) the intensive language courses which follow the implications of the cognitive-generative theory more closely than the older theories have been found successful; and the recent developments in linguistic and language-acquisition theory deny the assumptions underlying the Audiolingual Habit Theory.[9]

In the author's opinion the first reason, the failure of the Audiolingual Method was the most powerful driving force propelling the first-language acquisition theory into the forefront of the TESOL field, for the Audiolingual Method had failed to produce any meaningful achievements in the school FL curriculum in two decades. Number 3 above, is a viewpoint which is hard to judge, and therefore can not be persuasive. Numbers 2 and 4 are legitimate statements as mentioned above. The cognitive-generative view certainly shows a deeper understanding of first-language acquisition but it does not necessarily mean that it is applicable to all the aspects and stages of language learning. In other words, it is not theoretically approved that the process of first-language acquisition is the same as that of the adult's foreign language learning.

There are a number of dissimilarities between first-language acquisition and *foreign-language* learning. The following is a brief comparison of the variable factors peculiar to first-language and foreign language learning:

First-language Acquisition	Foreign-language Learning
1. There are many teachers.	1. There are few teachers.
2. All teachers are fluent speakers.	2. Few are fluent speakers.
3. A child's brain is flexible.	3. A student's brain is less flexible.
4. Motivation is high.	4. It is hard to be highly motivated.
5. There is much time to acquire.	5. Learning time is limited.
6. A child has no previous language system.	6. A child has a previous language system.
7. A child's cognitive ability is not developed.	7. Cognitive ability is developed.
8. A child can not read nor write.	8. A child has already acquired ability to read and write.
9. A child becomes a coordinate bilingual.[10]	9. He becomes a compound bilingual.[10]

Among these variable factors, noteworthy is the fact that there is a difference in the age of

9. Leon A. Jakobovits, *Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Issues* (Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1970), p. 26.

10. The coordinate bilingual is supposed to possess two "separated" meaning systems corresponding to his two languages. On the contrary, the compound bilingual is supposed to have a single, "fused" meaning system.

the learners. Generally speaking, FL learners start learning at the age of 12 or 13, when our brain has lost much of its flexibility. The assertion that the process of FL learning is the same or almost the same as that of first-language acquisition regardless of environmental factors would lead to the denial of the possibilities of education or training. Taking these differences into consideration, it would be extremely difficult to assume that first-language acquisition is the same as foreign-language learning.

Language learning is a complex phenomenon. It involves many variables. Accordingly, there should be many types of language learning.[11] Although the cognitive theory of first-language acquisition gives a general picture of language learning, it would be dangerous to overgeneralize this to all types, aspects and stages of language learning. If we do this, we would make the same mistake as we did when we tried to apply the theory and practice of structural linguistics to TESOL. What is needed is to make a detailed, specific learning hypothesis applicable to a specific type, aspect and stage of learning and to test it in actual fields of education. Only in this way could the implications of a new theory for TESOL be productive.

Conclusion

We have seen that the history of FL teaching has been the history of the influence from related sciences and that we need a solid basis in examining the ideas from related sciences. We have then discussed the possibilites of adopting the approaches of curriculum studies for establishing a framework for the FL teaching studies. Our contention was to set FL ability as the framework in which the ideas from related sciences are examined and assessed. Finally, we actually examined those ideas or theories of the related sciences from a viewpoint of FL ability, assessing their relevancy in establishing a TESOL theory. We found that the theories of structural linguistics and psycholinguistics are brought directly into TESOL without being subject to a close examination, assessment, specification and experimentation from ESOL teachers. This has been one of the main factors which has been swinging FL teachers from one extreme to the other like a pendulum.

The starting point for restoring a FL teacher's independence would be, (1) to stop being dogmatic about accepting theories from the related sciences, (2) to avoid the idea that there is only one correct approach to the study of FL teaching/learning, (3) to examine and experiment them in actual teaching situations, (4) to make detailed, specific and applicable assumptions, and finally, (5) to accumulate the data. It would lead to a systematic organization of FL teaching science.

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11. Leon A. Jakobovits presents a four dimentional model of bilingual description in terms of (1) degree of bilingual, (2) compound-coordinate bilingualism, (3) psycholinguistic functioning, and (4) development in time.

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