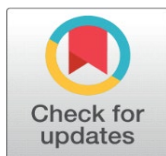
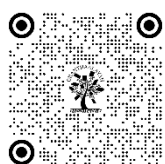


LINGUISTIC THEORIES AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Theoretical literature review helps us to locate in the analysis and interpretation of many theories, concepts, constructs, and phenomena a solution to the theme under investigation. The researcher through this type of review examines the relationship between pre-existing theories and identifies the gap which they have not addressed and through their current research address the identified gap. Linguistics is unquestionably a vast field of study. Hence, it has been necessary not to ramble, but take into consideration only the relevant studies, approaches and theories to build our research purposes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Theoretical literature review helps us to locate in the analysis and interpretation of many theories, concepts, constructs, and phenomena a solution to the theme under investigation. The researcher through this type of review examines the relationship between pre-existing theories and identifies the gap which they have not addressed and through their current research address the identified gap. Linguistics is unquestionably a vast field of study. Hence, it has been necessary not to ramble, but take into consideration only the relevant studies, approaches and theories to build our research purposes.

‘Linguistic theory is essentially a domain of work in progress, a discipline always in search of itself’ says Robert de Beaugrande in his book, *Linguistic Theory: The Discourse of Fundamental Works* (2). Theoretical Structure is applied in the discussion or investigation of theoretical frameworks. It is an approach which can be used to combine different concepts, models, and theories in research work or analyse a particular theory in line with the theme that we are studying and reviewing.

The theories of learning a language were dealt with by great philosophers like Plato in the ancient world. But it can be noted that Plato was leaning towards the western philosophical thought way back then. Plato was posing problems that were critical to the modern linguistic discourse. Plato tended to side with nature and believed that knowledge was

innate. Centuries later, the French philosopher Descartes also thought about the philosophy of language learning and in his opinion language acquisition was a simple and easy process and like Plato he believed in the innateness of language. He thought that language reflected the general rationality of human beings.

Subsequently, Locke's philosophy, *Tabula Rasa*, comes from the idea that all knowledge merges from outside ourselves through sensory experience rather than through innate knowledge that we have at birth. Locke rejected the idea that there was an innate logic behind language.

Building a science of language was **Ferdinand de Saussure's** ultimate aspiration. On a grand scale, Saussure foresaw 'a science that studies the life of signs within society and called it semiology (CG 16). For Saussure, 'language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology.' (CG 68).

Ferdinand de Saussure is rightly known as the "a founder of modern linguistics" (Fairclough, 5), or "the father of modern linguistics". He is the linguist whose work was described in Western linguistic thought as a "Copernican revolution" (Harris and Taylor 177) who viewed language as a "stable, structured system"; and he was "the first person to point out clearly that language was not a haphazard heap of individual items but a highly organised structure in which all the elements are interdependent" (Aitchison, 21). This is a major contribution to modern linguistic enquiry. Saussure is the linguist from whom is dated the era of synchronic or structural or descriptive linguistics, as opposed to diachronic or historical linguistics.

Harris and Taylor in their article, "Landmarks in Linguistic Thought: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure" mention that Saussure made a useful distinction between two levels of language which he designated as *langue* and *parole*. It is these contributions that gave birth to structuralism, behaviourism, innatism, and other schools of linguistic thought. Saussure, whose posthumously published *Cours de Linguistique Générale* in 1916, launched the 20th century structuralism on its course (177).

Leonard Bloomfield was greatly influenced by Ferdinand Saussure and in his notable work *Language* (1933), he endeavoured, through the creation of his own version of structuralism, to "lay down a rigorous framework for the description of languages" (Aitchison 33). According to Brown in his book, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Bloomfield stated that "only the 'publically observable responses' could be subject to investigation. The linguist's task according to the structuralist, was to describe human languages and to identify the structural characteristics of those languages (8).

The Behaviourist theory shows that language is constructed because of the exposure and positive reinforcement. In the middle of the 20th century, **B.F. Skinner** took Locke's ideas of sensory input and posited his own theory of behaviourism. According to Skinner, all behaviour is no more than a response to external stimuli and there's no innate programming within a human being to learn a language at birth. Skinner's Education Learning Theory is known as Behaviorism. This theory of learning considers that learning transpires through teachers' rewards and punishments that lead to changes in behavior (Duchesne 160; Blaise, 112; Pritchard, 7).

Skinner maintained that languages are acquired through a process of stimulus-response-reward. Furthermore, he went on to say that the process of acquiring language can be seen as a question of imitating parents, by "creating associations between words and real-word objects" (17). It is the stimulus that acts as an object. Additionally, it is constant repetition that makes that association become a habit. Finally, not only will the child be rewarded by getting what he/she wanted, but also, he/she would get the approval of the father. On the whole, Skinner's theory claims that we are born a *tabula rasa*, and that it is the environment that plays an important role on the process of acquiring language.

What differentiates Skinner from those who came before him is the level of detail he went into when connecting behaviourism and language learning. In his concept of what he called "operant conditioning," language learning grew out of a process of reinforcement and punishment whereby individuals are conditioned into saying the right thing. Skinner described a mechanism for language learning that hadn't existed before on the *tabula rasa* side of the language acquisition debate. Skinner explained that a process of conditioning must be achieved for us to succeed in learning a language. Behaviourists viewed the mind as something impossible to know. "Behaviour was entirely the product of external factors" (17). Behaviourist psychologists tried to lay down guidelines for language acquisition. Skinner contributed to that by outlining an analogy between the process of acquiring a first language and a behaviourist experiment, which consisted on training a pigeon by giving it some rewards. Skinner was emphasizing that it is nurturing that is responsible for learning, not nature. Attached to this theory, one can find the theory of Connectionism, which

claims that language is a system of patterns, which has been acquired by learning mechanisms. The infant will develop some patterns in his head, and hence these patterns will cause the emergence of grammatical languages.

Around the same time as Skinner there came another linguistic powerhouse who has left a lasting impression on the field of linguistics, namely, **Noam Chomsky**. Chomsky developed a naturalistic approach to the study of language which is said to have contributed to the cognitive revolution in psychology. Chomsky, a linguist, philosopher, writer, and lecturer has transformed linguistics. The school of deep or generative grammar still holds centre stage. Chomsky criticized behaviourist, B.F. Skinner's book *Verbal Behaviour* in 1972. Chomsky's main concern was to explain two striking features of language — the speed with which children acquire a language, and its astonishing productiveness, our ability to create an endless supply of grammatically correct sentences without apparently knowing the rules. This can be possible only by having an underlying syntax and rules to convert syntax to what is spoken. The syntax was universal and simple. Chomsky argued that it was possible by innate transformation rules by which a fundamental deep structure is converted to the surface sentence.

The theory that Chomsky proposed is known as Universal Grammar and it asserts nearly the exact opposite of what Skinner had offered in his theory. Skinner considered all learning coming from external stimuli, but Chomsky saw an innate device in the human mind for language acquisition. Chomsky had in fact a major bone to pick with Skinner's theory and it had to do with Plato's problem. If Skinner is right, how is it that children can learn a language so quickly, creating and understanding sentences they have never heard before?

Noam Chomsky coined the term Cartesian linguistics with the publication of his book on linguistics, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* in 1966. The word "Cartesian" is the adjective pertaining to René Descartes, a prominent 17th-century philosopher. However, rather than confine himself to the works of Descartes, Chomsky surveys other authors interested in rationalist thought. In particular, Chomsky discusses the Port-Royal Grammar that was published in 1660, a book which predicts some of his own ideas concerning universal grammar. This "Cartesian" movement, according to Chomsky, observed the creativity involved in everyday language and presented the idea that there were universal principles behind every language.

Generative Grammar has undergone several major revisions since its initial introduction by Noam Chomsky in 1957. The present term standard theory is used to refer to the model of generative grammar as expounded in the 1965 book by Chomsky *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Dana Hinders in her description of Generative grammar in a nutshell writes that:

It is a branch of theoretical linguistics that works to provide a set of rules that can accurately predict which combinations of words are able to make grammatically correct sentences. Those who study this subject hope to improve our overall understanding of the mental makeup of the human species as a whole. Generative grammar has been associated with several schools of linguistics, including transformational grammar, relational grammar, categorial grammar, tree-adjoining grammar, head-driven phrase structure grammar, generalized phrase structure grammar, relational grammar, and lexical-functional grammar (np).

Stephen Krashen is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. His recent research has been involved in the study of non-English and bilingual language acquisition. The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most important of the five hypotheses in Krashen's linguistic theory and the most widely known and influential among linguists and language teachers. His theory is quite popular, though with some reservations.

Following Chomsky's criticism of both the behaviourist theories of learning and structuralist theories of language, audiolingualism gave way to the communicative approach, the preferred set of approaches from the early 1980s to the present day. Linguistic theory became much more cognitively oriented, and attention was directed towards how learners' 'interlanguage' could be understood and its development supported (Corbett 6).

Ricardo Edmundo Schütz in his article, "Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition" explains his theory of language acquisition. Krashen writes about two independent systems of second language acquisition: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language, that is natural communication through which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. Whereas, the 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it includes a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge

of grammar rules etc. A deductive approach in a teacher-centred setting produces 'learning', while an inductive approach in a student-centred setting leads to 'acquisition'. Therefore, it can be said that for Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition' (np).

Stephen Krashen's theory has been mentioned here, as it can be seen that he has similar views to that of Noam Chomsky who believes in the innate power to acquire language skills. Chomsky's Universal Grammar Theory and Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis state that comprehensible input is essential to make the acquisition process possible, since the brain needs an initial element to work with and develop further structures to create and develop a new language, either L1 or L2 (Cook137-157).

Thus, it can be seen quite evidently that Noam Chomsky establishes the milestone of the cognitive theories for language acquisition, even though it is centred on the encrypted processes that may occur in the human brain. Ranko Bugarski from the University of Belgrade in his chapter, "The Object of Linguistics in Historical Perspective" in the book, *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics*, discusses how the various theories of linguistics are now being blended together to help study the science of language more comprehensively. Saussure proclaimed, in the famous last sentence of the Cours, that the true and unique object of linguistics is language studied in itself (5). The present situation in linguistics shows that there is a general trend towards a theoretically motivated integration of previously divergent approaches. There is also a parallel trend towards encompassing different dimensions of language by a single framework of analysis and explanation:

The innate and the acquired; the universal and the particular; the underlying and the superficial; rules of language and the rules of speaking; language and the mind; language in culture and society – all these and many other crucial topics have caught, and continue to hold, the attention of linguists. Language as a phenomenon by which by its complex nature and its central role in human life has inspired debate and investigation of this order – that is the object of linguistics today (6).

Muna Alijohani in her article, "Principles of "Constructivism" in Foreign Language Teaching" comments about the recent development of the cognitive theory of language that led to constructivism and she quotes Kaufman who says that:

Language pedagogy has integrated a rich palette of instructional approaches that underscore the centrality and diversity of learners and their active engagement in authentic and meaningful pursuits as individuals and within communities of learners (97).

Constructivism argues that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Bereiter 67). Catherine Twomey Fosnot and Randall Stewart Perry in their chapter "Constructivism: A Psychological Theory of Learning" write that the cognitive theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Dewey and others provide the basis for a psychological theory of learning named constructivism. Humans are social beings and have conventional communities, societies, and nations and forms of communication and thus cultures as an adaptive mechanism. Constructivism underlines the fact that learning is not the result of development, but learning is development. It also requires self-organization and invention. The classroom needs to be seen as a "community of discourse engaged activity, reflection and conversation", says Fosnot quoting from her other book, *Enquiring Teachers, Enquiring Learners* (34).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) can be considered the father of the theory of constructivism. Constructivism argues that the learner has to be proactive when they learn, taking new information, and shaping it to their understanding, rather than just sitting still and passively absorbing information like a sponge. The Swiss psychologist placed acquisition of language within the context of a child's mental or cognitive development. Anastasia Belyh in her online article "Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development" writes that, Albert Einstein once called Piaget's discoveries of cognitive development as, "so simple only a genius could have thought of it" (np). At the heart of Piaget's theory is the idea that children are born with a basic mental structure, which provides the structure for future learning and knowledge. He saw development as a progressive reorganisation of these mental processes. This came about due to biological maturation, as well as environmental experience.

He argued that a child has to understand a concept before s/he can acquire the particular language form which expresses that concept. From Piaget we get active learning, schemes, assimilation and accommodation, etc. The key takeaway from Piaget's theory should be that learning and gaining intelligence is an active process, not passive. The

theory hypothesizes that for continuous change and adaptation to the environment – one does not actively transform thoughts to fit the surrounding environment.

The key concepts in Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development are:

- Schema -an organized pattern of thought or behaviour that organizes categories of information and the relationships among them.
- Accommodation -involves altering existing schema or ideas, as a result of new information or new experiences. New schemas may also develop during this process.
- Assimilation -using an existing schema to deal with a new object or situation.
- Equilibrium -humans naturally strive to achieve a cognitive balance; there must be a balance between applying prior knowledge(assimilation) and changing schemata to account for new information (accommodation).

Adaptation is a term referring to the ability to adjust to new information and experiences. Learning is essentially adapting to our constantly changing environment. Through adaptation, we are able to adopt new behaviours that allow us to cope with change (Kendra Cherry np).

Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) is a renowned Soviet psychologist and father of social constructivist learning theory. He has stated that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level” (57). One of the cornerstones of Vygotsky’s work is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Focusing on the potential for learner development in context of social interaction, the ZPD is “the distance between the [learner’s] actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of [the learner’s] potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. Vygotsky believed that the community plays a dominant role in the process of “making meaning.” (Vygotsky 85 -87). Therefore, he says that the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about. Cultures and their knowledge-base are constantly in a process of change and the knowledge stored by individuals is not a rigid copy of some socially constructed template. In learning a culture, each child changes that culture (Fox 30).

The constructivist theory posits that knowledge can only exist within the human mind, and that it does not have to match any real-world reality (Driscoll, 2000). From Vygotsky we get social constructivism, group work, apprenticeship, etc. Constructivism embraces a “top-down” rather than a “bottom-up” instructional methodology. This means that, rather than teach all of the details that lead to a main idea, students discover the main idea and then derive the details (Aljohani 98).

The socially-based knowledge-building process of ZPD can be initiated, for instance, by group work centred around problems, case studies, simulations or projects as well as discussions on personal experiences, readings, resources, and learning products. In short, in educational practice, social constructivism involves students learning from and with each other throughout the semester.

The online article, “Lev Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Development” in the website, *Envision Your Evolution* explains Vygotsky’s theory clearly. Scaffolding is a concept in this theory that explains how a child receives and collects knowledge. Within the zone of proximal development, the structure that enables an individual to move forward in their ability is termed as scaffolding. Scaffolding is an incremental change in information support that steps the learner up to the highest-level s/he can achieve with support. This gain in knowledge would be an example of intermental learning, whereas, when the individual undertakes the new skill on their own, s/he has accomplished intramental learning.

When the individual is able to transfer the newly learned skill to a different context, which may require abstract thought, the learning has become “decontextualised”. This means the individual does not have to remain in the physical situation in which s/he learned the skill. They are also able to imagine a scenario and use hypothetico-deductive reasoning to formulate an answer to a question which is abstract in nature (np).

Lev Vygotsky’s Theory emphasizes the importance of becoming conscious of the zone of proximal development the child currently manifests and correctly predict the outcome he/she is most likely to direct based on his capabilities. Lev Vygotsky also suggested that human development results from a dynamic interaction between individuals and society. Through this interaction, children learn gradually and continuously from parents and teachers. This learning, however, can vary from one culture to the next. It is important to note that Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Development emphasizes

the dynamic nature of this interaction. Society does not just impact people; people also affect their society. The Russian also viewed language development as a semiotic mediator of the psychic activity. Through language, the individual is organising his or her perceptions and thinking processes.

Jerome Bruner (1915-2016) established the Constructivism, where the interactionism approach to language development, exploring such themes as the acquisition of communicative intents and the development of their linguistic expression, the interactive context of language use in early childhood, and the role of parental input and scaffolding behaviour in the acquisition of linguistic forms.

Language is important for the increased ability to deal with abstract concepts. Jerome Bruner argues that language can code stimuli and free an individual from the constraints of dealing only with appearances, to provide a more complex yet flexible cognition.

Bruner is poignant about language and how this affects cognition within this theory of sociocultural learning development. Bruner, in his article "The Role of Dialogue in Language Acquisition", like Vygotsky, highlighted the social nature of learning, quoting that other people should help a child develop skills through the process of scaffolding. He says that:

It refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring' (Bruner19).

Constructivism's central idea is that human learning is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. This prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge an individual will construct from new learning experiences (Phillips 5-12). Teachers and parents alike are encouraged to envelop the scaffolding method of communication which is a strategy aimed to simplifying tasks within learning by making smaller steps, all leading to the final outcome. This aids in maintaining any frustration while keeping in mind what is important throughout the learning process. The sociocultural constructivist theory developed by Jerome Bruner takes known information and expounds upon it, any teacher lesson plans, teacher worksheets, or resources should in fact be constantly building the learner's knowledge in a spiral manner.

John Dewey (1859 – 1952) was a psychologist, philosopher and well-known American educational reformer. His thoughts on education, art, logic and ethics have influenced movements around the world. He is considered as the co-founder of functional psychology. He led the 'progressive' movement in America and is world-renowned for his works on education, nature, democracy and inquiry. He strongly advocated the primary need for transmission of education through effective communication. Dewey campaigned educational reform and denounced an authoritarian approach. He believed that children or students should be able to understand actual experiences and be a part of hands-on experiential education.

Dewey's functional psychology laid practical emphasis on application and action to reason with the paradigms of traditional stimulus-response. The way an individual views a situation was believed to influence the unitary nature of sensation and response to the situation (np).

John Dewey is probably most famous for his role in what is called progressive education. Dewey presented his views on education in 'My Pedagogic Creed', 'School and Society', and 'The Child and Curriculum'. Progressive education is essentially a view of education that emphasizes the need to learn by doing. Dewey believed that human beings learn through a 'hands-on' approach. This places Dewey in the educational philosophy of pragmatism.

Pragmatists believe that reality must be experienced. From Dewey's educational point of view, this means that students must interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. Dewey felt the same idea was true for teachers and held that teachers and students must learn together. His view of the classroom was deeply rooted in democratic ideals, which promoted equal voice among all participants in the learning experience. Experience has a meaning when this refers to consequence, as well. Only in this situation the child learns something new (Dewey 124). Experience means knowledge.

Therefore, it can be said that the constructivist conceptions of learning have their historical roots in the work of Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget and Jerome Bruner. Constructivist theory claims that language is constructed as part of cognitive learning systems that the infant builds. The "revolution" which began with humanistic approach and was followed by cognitive theory which later developed into what is now known as constructivism. According to constructivists, learners create their own individual representations of the world. As in humanistic approach, the learner is treated as one holistic unit, whose emotions and feelings are important because they shape learners' attitude. Correspondingly, their creativity

allows them to construct the view on the world in their own unique way. At present, constructivism is the most supported approach to language learning and its main contribution to educational psychology is the learner-centred approach, which emphasizes the autonomy of learners in the process of their education as the realist philosophers such as Plato claimed.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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