

**College of Education for Humanities**  
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**Curriculum Design**

**“Theories of Learning”**

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# **Theories of Learning**

## **Introduction:**

Although specific theories of the nature of language may provide the basis for a particular Teaching method, all methods reflect , either explicitly or implicitly, a theory of language Learning. Language learning theories account for the cognitive, personal, interpersonal, And social processes learners make use of in second language learning.

## **Behaviorism**

This theory was based on the view that learning is a process in which specific behaviors are acquired in response to specific stimuli. Correct responses are reinforced and increase the chance of the behavior becoming learned (Skinner 1957 ) . Learning was said to involve habit formation through repetition and reinforcement. This theory provided the basis for the Audio-lingual Method. Language was taught through extensive drilling and repetition exercises and through making use of activities that minimized the chances of producing mistakes.

## **Cognitive - Code learning**

This view was developed in the 1960s as an alternative to behaviorism and emphasized that language learning was a cognitive process depending on both deductive and inductive learning as well as meaningful practice. Students are taught grammatical rules which they then apply in practice. Learning is seen to depend on cognitive processing and mental effort. The PPP approach (Presentation - Practice - Production ) used in Situational Language Teaching can be linked to cognitive - code learning, as well as to methods such as the Silent Way.

## **Creative - Construction Hypothesis**

This theory, first proposed in the 1970s but still implicit in current theories of second language acquisition, suggests that learning is not simply a question of reproducing input but creative process. Errors are seen as evidence of learning rather than signs of faulty learning.

Communicative Language Teaching reflects this view of learning and introduced the concept of fluency work in teaching, where the communication of meaning rather than a grammatically precise use of language is the focus.

## **Skill Learning**

Skills are integrated sets of behaviors that are learned through practice. Skill learning theory suggests that complex uses of language are made up of a hierarchy of skills. Initially, skills are often consciously managed and directed by the learner, such as learning how to make a class presentation in English. This is called controlled processing (Ortega 2009). Over time skills can become automatic and do not require conscious attention. This is called automatic processing. Learning involves development from controlled to automatic processing, that is, the cumulative learning of skills.

## **Interactional Theory**

This theory argues that learning is an interactive process and depends on learners working together to achieve mutual understanding. Central to this view of learning is the concept of negotiation of meaning - the modification of input learners receive when they communicate with more advanced learners or native speakers and the kind of feedback they receive from their interlocutors. More competent speakers will typically modify their input by using known vocabulary, speaking more slowly, saying things in different ways, adjusting the topic, avoiding idioms, using a slower rate of speech, using stress on key words, repeating key elements, using simpler grammatical structures, paraphrasing and elaborating, and so on. In this way modified input facilitates both understanding and learning.

## **Constructivism**

Constructivism is another learning theory that has had a powerful influence on education and on theories of second language learning. It draws on the work of Jean Piaget and John Dewey on child development as well as on the work of Lev Vygotsky. Rather than viewing learning as a passive process and the result of the internalization of outside knowledge (i.e., as a process of transmission), learning is seen as something that results from the learners' internal construction of meaning. This latter social view of constructivism is now referred to as sociocultural

learning theory and is discussed below. ) Constructivist approaches to learning emphasize student - centered and project -based learning where students pose questions, explore multiple interpretations of meaning, and where the teacher acts as facilitator and guide. Constructivist theories of learning are seen in concepts such as restructuring, schema theory, and scaffolding (see below) and can also be seen in Communicative Language Teaching.

### **Sociocultural learning theory (also known as social constructivism )**

This theory can be seen as an extension of both constructivism and interactional theory and views language learning as resulting from dialogue between a learner and a more knowledgeable other person . The term sociocultural means that learning takes place in a particular social setting (e.g. a classroom ) , in which there is interaction between people( teachers and students ) , objects ( texts, books, images ) , and culturally organized activities and events ( instructional acts and sequences ) . Learning is a process of guided participation, mediated through the direction of a more knowledgeable other. Through repeated participation in a variety of joint activities.

### **Genre Theory**

Genre refers to an area of human activity where there are norms of language usage, such as in science, business, medicine, literature. Texts are the units of discourse that occur in different genres such as narratives, descriptions, and explanations. The main concepts of this model of language can be summarized as follows ( Feez1998: 5 ):

- Language is a resource for making meaning.
- The resource of language consists of a set of interrelated systems.
- Language users draw on this resource each time they use language.
- Language users create texts to create meaning.
- Texts are shaped by the social context in which they are used.

- The social context is shaped by the people using language. It has also had an impact on the teaching of both English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes.

## **Lexical Theory**

The lexical view of language prioritizes the role of lexis and lexical chunks or phrases in language and highlights the interrelatedness of grammar and vocabulary. Rather than seeing lexis and grammar as discrete, they are viewed as being intrinsically related. Lexically-based learning and argue for a greater role for vocabulary as well as lexical phrases and chunks in language teaching. This view is reflected most directly in the Lexical Approach, but is also compatible with aspects of Content – Based Instruction and CLIL.

## **Individual Factors**

The attributes individual learners bring to language learning can also have an important influence on learning, and teaching methods often seek to take account of these attributes. These include learning style preferences ( such as whether a learner likes to learn in groups or prefers learning alone ); affective factors such as shyness , anxiety, enthusiasm , and other emotions that language learning may elicit and that may influence the learners willingness to communicate; motivation, which refers to the learners attitude , desire, interest in , and willingness to invest effort in learning a second language ; learning strategies - the ways in which learners plan , manage , and evaluate their own learning - for example , monitoring their language development over time and identifying areas that need additional effort and improvement .