FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract: Foreign language learning and teaching have undergone a significant paradigm shift as a result of the research and experiences that have expanded the scientific and theoretical knowledge base on how students learn and acquire a foreign language. Current developments point to public pedagogy, social media, and action research as additional ways to foster intercultural competence and language learning.

Keywords: foreign language, intercultural competence, multilingualism

A language is considered foreign if it is learned largely in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where the teaching act occurs. Study of another language allows the individual to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself. From the benefits of learning another language, it is to be mentioned that provides access into a perspective other than one's own, increases the ability to see connections across content areas, and promotes an interdisciplinary perspective while gaining intercultural understandings. Foreign language education refers to the teaching of a modern language that is is neither an official language nor the mother tongue of a significant part of the population[1].

Foreign language learning and teaching have undergone a significant paradigm shift as a result of the research and experiences that have expanded the scientific and theoretical knowledge base on how students learn and acquire a foreign language. Traditionally, learning a foreign language was thought to be a 'mimetic' activity in the past teaching approaches, a process that involved students repeating or imitating new information. But recent trends in foreign language research have increasingly focused on multilingualism and the interplay of multiple linguistic systems in the language learner. One area of multilingualism that has been much examined is cross-linguistic influence (also known as language transfer, linguistic interference, the role of the mother tongue, native language influence, and language mixing[2].

Individual cognitive (e.g., intelligence, aptitude, or ability) and affective (e.g., attitude and personality variables) factors were also analyzed. Skehan (1986) noted a fairly strong relationship between cognitive variables such as aptitude, intelligence, and language achievement for learners in foreign language classrooms[3]. Other factors analyzed include the age of the learner. Researchers have typically aimed at understanding how early versus late learning affects successful acquisition, and discussed this issue in terms of a critical period of acquisition in which language acquisition seemed to depend on appropriate in- put during this

[1] Selinker, L., 1974. Interlanguage. In: Schumann, J.H., Stenson, N. (Eds.), *New Frontiers in Second Language Learning.* Newbury House, Rowey, MA.
[2]Odlin, T., 2003. Cross-linguistic influence. In: Doughty, C., Long, M. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition. Blackwell*, pp. 436–486.
[3]Skehan, P., 1986. *The role of foreign language aptitude in a model of school learning. Language Testing 3*, 188–221.

time frame.[4] Although critical period effects in L2 learning are still being debated, researchers generally agree that early learning of L2 is associated with higher ultimate proficiency, and age of acquisition is reliably the strongest predictor of ultimate attainment in the language[5].

Language teaching has experienced numerous curricular innovations in the recent years in response to the importance of providing students with opportunities to acquire and practice the foreign language in contextualized and meaningful language communicative tasks at all stages of the second or foreign language acquisition process. Communicative language teaching (CLT), the term most associated with current discussion of method, emerged as a significant approach that found universal resonance and support in theory and application in many contexts and across disciplines (linguists, methodologists, and curriculum developers). Central to the rise of CLT was the realization that linguistic competence does not on its own achieve communicative competence and that language used in meaningful, authentic contexts is more readily acquired.[6]

Pair work, group work, cooperative/collaborative learning settings, authentic materials, culturally integrated lesson content, and interactive tasks focused on the cognitive and affective do- mains were integrated into foreign language classrooms. In addition, there has been an important call for the reconceptualization of theoretical underpinnings related to use of the target language for language instruction.

Intercultural Competence

Increasingly, language educators contend that foreign language learning should increase students' intercultural competence (IC) which would allow them to see relationships between different cultures, mediate across these cultures, and critically analyze cultures including their own. [7]Language teachers have now recognized their role in eliciting culture learning in their classrooms and ways to access that learning.[8]

Despite much research into effective strategies and approaches to teaching and assessing in-tercultural competency in foreign language classrooms, several challenges have been put forward. One such challenge is that of sensitizing students to the value of seeing the world through the language/culture of another and creating a more affective climate for developing intercultural competency. [9]

Foreign Languages: Future Directions

One area that remains controversial in the world of foreign and second language teaching today is the question: Is native-like attainment a necessary or desirable goal in the global world we live in today? In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the question of whether speakers should conform to native speaker norms of English in light of its increasing use in international contexts has been widely debated in recent years.[10] In light of this issue many scholars in the field have raised the question of why native speaker communities are most often a model for learners of English as an international language. One of the most important

[4]Hernandez, A.E., Ping, L., 2007. *Age of acquisition: its neural and computational mechanisms. Psychological Bulletin* 133 (4), 638–650.
[5]Birdsong, D., 2006. *Age and second language acquisition and processing: a selective overview. Language Learning* 56, 9–49.
[6]Canale, M., Swain, M., 1980. *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. Applied Linguistics* 1, 1–47.
[7]Chapelle, C., 2010. *If intercultural competence is the goal, what are the materials?. In: Proceedings of CERCLL Intercultural Competence Conference*. CERCLL, pp. 27–50.
[8]Moloney, R., Harbon, L., 2010. *Making intercultural language learning visible and assessable. In: Proceedings of CERCLL Intercultural Competence Conference.* CERCLLpp. 281–303.
[9]Fonseca-Greber, B., 2010. *Social obstacles to intercultural competence in American language classrooms. In: Proceedings of CERCLL Intercultural Competence Conference.* CERCLL pp. 102–123.
[10]Timmis, I., 2002. *Native speaker norms and international English: a classroom view.* ELT Journal 56 (3), 240–249.

aspects of the process of modern globalization is the role of English as a universal language. English language becomes the language of international communication, its knowledge is a prerequisite for the qualitative performance of professional du- ties. The number of people studying English around the world increases every year. English becomes a universal communication tool as a second foreign language, as its conversance gives economic, social and political advantages.

Another important direction in research that requires more attention is use and effect of computer technology on foreign language learning. As classroom tasks become more focused on real-world issues, texts, or events, and problem-solving-based tasks, technology introduces a new dimension to the teaching and learning process that incorporates the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Voice Thread, and others. Digital media allows students to manipulate learning materials and language at their own pace and according to individual needs. Students examine reports, authentic documents, and web pages to find information that can be synthesized and dis- cussed later and can collaborate electronically with youth from around the world. In such a learning environment the role of the teacher changes from one of authority figure or expert who delivers knowledge to one who facilitates, guides, and supports student learning.

Methodologically classroom-oriented research has been largely conducted within the framework of correlational approaches, case studies, survey research, ethnographic research, experiments, and discourse analysis.[11]Furthermore, as learning and teaching innovations continue to be tested and researched, new insights will be gained that will influence teaching practices globally.

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