



THEORIES OF TEACHING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Annotation

Language teaching is a complex field that involves not just the transfer of linguistic knowledge but also the fostering of communicative competence and cultural understanding. Theories of teaching in language education provide a foundation that informs how language is taught and learned. This article explores the major theories underpinning language teaching, examining their principles, applications, and implications for classroom practice.

Language teaching is the process of helping learners acquire the ability to understand, speak, read, and write a language other than their native tongue. It involves the systematic instruction of linguistic skills—such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication strategies—within a structured framework, often tailored to learners' specific needs and contexts. More than just teaching rules of grammar or vocabulary lists, language teaching aims to develop learners' ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. It encompasses not only the transmission of linguistic knowledge but also the cultivation of cultural understanding, communicative competence, and learner autonomy.

Key Aspects of Language Teaching:

a. **Skills Development:** Teaching the four core language skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

b. **Communicative Competence:** Enabling learners to communicate meaningfully, not just accurately.

c. **Methodology:** Employing various instructional methods and techniques based on language learning theories.

d. **Learner-Centeredness:** Adapting teaching to learners' age, goals, proficiency level, and learning styles.

e. **Cultural Awareness:** Integrating cultural knowledge to help learners understand context and pragmatics.

f. **Assessment:** Measuring learners' progress through tests, quizzes, performance tasks, and feedback.

One of the earliest theories applied to language teaching was the Behaviorist Theory, rooted in the work of B.F. Skinner (1957). According to behaviorism, language learning is a process of habit formation. Learners acquire language through stimulus-response associations reinforced by positive feedback. In language teaching, this theory gave rise to methods like the Audiolingual Method, which emphasizes repetition, drills, and mimicry. The goal is to instill correct language habits through reinforcement and avoidance of errors. While behaviorism helped develop structured, systematic practice routines, it underestimates the role of cognitive processes and creativity in language use. It also tends to ignore meaning and communicative purpose.

Contrasting behaviorism, the Innatist Theory, most notably advanced by Noam Chomsky (1965), argues that humans possess an innate Language Acquisition Device (LAD)—a biological capacity for language learning. This theory stresses that language acquisition is a natural, subconscious process guided by internal cognitive structures. In language teaching, this perspective supports natural approaches and immersion techniques, encouraging exposure to meaningful communication rather than rote drills. Teaching should provide rich, comprehensible input in authentic contexts, focusing on meaning rather than form alone. The emphasis shifts from repetition to interaction.

The Cognitive Theory of language learning considers the mental processes involved in acquiring language. Influenced by Jean Piaget's developmental psychology, it views learning as an active process where learners construct knowledge by understanding and organizing information. In language teaching, cognitive theory promotes strategies that enhance problem-solving, reasoning, and metalinguistic awareness. Learners are encouraged to notice language patterns and make hypotheses about language rules. Classroom application: Methods like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) stem from this approach, where language is learned through meaningful tasks and content exploration.

Developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the social context of learning. Language acquisition is seen as a socially mediated process where interaction with more knowledgeable others (teachers, peers) supports development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In practice, this theory encourages collaborative learning, scaffolding, and dialogic teaching methods that integrate social interaction with cognitive development. Group work, peer feedback, and communicative activities are central to fostering language learning.

Emerging in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of earlier methods, Communicative Language Teaching is not a theory per se but a methodological approach grounded in communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). It integrates insights from sociolinguistics and pragmatics, focusing on the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. CLT encourages authentic communication, fluency, and learner autonomy. It often incorporates role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and discussions to promote interaction.

Constructivism builds on cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, positing that learners construct their own understanding and knowledge through experience and reflection (Bruner, 1961; Piaget, 1954). Language learning is thus a process of personal meaning-making. Teaching under constructivism encourages learner-centered activities, critical thinking, and exploration. Learners are viewed as active agents responsible for their own learning paths.

Theories of teaching in language education provide valuable frameworks for understanding how language is learned and how teaching can be optimized. From behaviorism's emphasis on habit formation to the sociocultural focus on interaction, and the communicative approach's real-world application, each theory contributes unique insights. Effective language teaching often involves integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to address diverse learner needs and contexts. By grounding teaching practices in sound theory, educators can create dynamic, meaningful, and effective language learning environments

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