

1 How Perspectives on Language Development Affect English as a 2 Foreign Langage Teaching

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7 **Abstract**

8 Based on the review of three perspectives of language development, this paper is aimed to
9 focus on interactionalist?s position and provides insights into the influences of it on English as
10 a foreign language teaching (EFLT).

11

12 **Index terms**— Behaviorism Innatism Interactionalist?s position.

13 **1 Introduction**

14 n the field of SLA (second language acquisition), many theories, approaches and hypotheses have come into being.
15 And all these theories, approaches and hypotheses have more or less affected teaching practice. For example, it
16 is due to the altering of different assumptions about language development, teaching methods have been greatly
17 influenced. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Classical Method -Grammar Translation Method was
18 replaced by the Direct Method, which was based on the assumption that second language is learned in a natural
19 way, just like the first language acquisition ??Brown, 2000, p. 45). In 1940s and 1950s, it was due to the
20 behavioristic approach to the explanation of language development, Audiolingual Method (ALM) was popular
21 (ibid, p. 74). In 1970s, Noam Chomsky's innatistic view brought about an innovation in language teaching, during
22 which many methods emerged, such as Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response and Natural
23 Approach (ibid, pp. 103-108). From the examples above, we know that the assumptions or understandings
24 towards language development have great effects on the choices of teaching methods. However, the effects are
25 not constrained to teaching methods, yet other aspects of teaching are influenced by it. In this paper, I intend to
26 explore the effects of understanding of language development on EFLT (English as a foreign language teaching)
27 in classroom. First of all, I'll have a brief review of the literature of different perspectives on the process of
28 language development. After that, I will discuss the potential effects on EFLT in classroom based on one of the
29 perspectives.

30 **2 II.**

31 Theoretical Approaches to the Explanations of Language Development

32 a) The Forms of Language Development Before we start discussing about the process of language development,
33 it is essential to know the various ways of language acquisition first. Every normal people speak at least one
34 language. The process of acquiring the first language is named as L1 acquisition. If it is one language, we
35 call this 'monolingual FLA' (FLA refers to first language acquisition) ??Klein, 1986, p. 4). If two languages
36 are acquired as the first language at the same time, we call this 'bilingual FLA' (ibid. p. 4). However, most
37 people in modern society may speak more than one language. The process of acquiring a second or a third
38 language is named as L2 acquisition. Compared with a child's success in L1 acquisition, it seems troublesome
39 for people to speak a second language as fluently and naturally as a child even though they consume much
40 time and energy in learning L2. Wondering about this sharp contrast, it is natural for people to think about
41 how a child is acquiring the first language. Therefore, many theories have been set up in the explanation of L1
42 acquisition. The theoretical approaches accounting for child's L1 acquisition have provided a foundation for the
43 understanding of L2 acquisition. Next, I will explore the understandings of language development with regards

3 III. EFLT(ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

44 to L1 acquisition and its impacts on the understandings of L2 learning. b) Three perspectives on language
45 development A lot of approaches have been conducted on child's L1 acquisition. As a result, many theories have
46 come into being. Generally speaking, there are mainly three perspectives. Those are: a. Behaviorism b. Innatism
47 c. Interactionist's position Behaviorists view language development as a process of habit formation which involves
48 imitation, practice, correct reinforcement ??Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 9). In this process learners receive
49 stimuli from the environment, make responses, and if the response is correct, it will be reinforced by others as
50 a result of which, a habit is formed ??Brown, 2000, p. 22). Therefore, from behaviorists' point of view, "the
51 quality and quantity of the language which the child hears, as well as the consistency of the reinforcement offered
52 by others in the environment, should have an effect on the child's success in language learning." (Lightbown &
53 Spada, 1999, p. 9) However, behaviorists' view on language development has received a lot of critics. Noam
54 Chomsky (as cited in Emmitt & Pollock, 1997, p. 164) argued that, a child could produce or comprehend some
55 words that he has never heard. Therefore, behaviorists' approach to the explanation of language development
56 is discredited. However, Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 26) maintained that, behaviorists' explanation to
57 language development can account for the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical morphemes. This is where
58 we should value. Noam Chomsky's LAD (Language Acquisition Device) and UG (Universal Grammar) are two
59 of the most prominent theories within the framework of innatism. Chomsky maintains that a child is endowed
60 with a universal innate mechanism that can help in acquiring a language system only by being exposed to some
61 samples (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 16; Brown, 2000, pp. 24-27; Emmit & Pollock, 1997, p. 164).
62 At first, he used the term LAD to indicate the innate capacity of a child (Chomsky, 1959, cited in Brown, 2000, p.
63 24). Later, Chomsky and his followers adopted the term UG ??Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 16). Some scholars
64 value the availability of UG and believe that UG is useful in teaching. Cook (2000) wrote in her book Second
65 Language Learning and Language Teaching that "the grammar is seen as universal; the differences between
66 languages come down to how words behave in sentences." (p. 158) However, there are also some critics on it.
67 ??lein (1986, p. 8) argued that if UG worked in L1 acquisition and after L1 acquisition, 'some open parameters
68 are fixed' (Chomsky's formulation), why learning a second language appears more troublesome to adults than
69 to children. Therefore, a teacher should be cautious in applying UG in teaching. Krashen, who has built the
70 renowned Monitor model/ Input Hypothesis, forms another important theory within innatism. Nevertheless, his
71 five hypotheses have received more critics than approvals.

72 Interactionalists hold that language acquisition is a result of children's cognitive development and linguistic
73 environment in social interaction ??Lightbown & Spada, 1999, pp. 22-23; ??rown, 2000, pp. 28-29). Apparently,
74 they seek to explain language development from the inside as well as the outside. And this might be a better
75 way to explain language development.

76 There are two approaches within the framework of interactistic framework. One is a cognitive approach.
77 The other is a social approach. Jean Piaget (as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 23) maintained that
78 the cognitive development of a child partly influence the use of language. Another interactionist Michael Long
79 (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 287) proposed the interaction hypothesis, which highlights the use of modified
80 interaction in realizing comprehensible input. And Long believed that "comprehensible input promotes language
81 acquisition." (as quoted in ??ightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 43). Social interactionists put emphasis on the role of
82 social interactonin language development. This point of view is developed by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky (as
83 cited in Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 44) who maintained that social interaction between the learner and the
84 interlocutor plays an important role in language development. The definition of his zone of proximal development,
85 known as ZPD, could at best underpin his point of view: "?the distance between the actual developmental as
86 determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem
87 solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86, cited in ??ee,
88 1987, p. 7) To sum up, interactionists take a point of view that modified interaction make input comprehensible
89 hence promoting language development; and interactions between the learner and advanced or peer interlocutor
90 are effective in guiding learners achieve a potential language level.

91 3 III. EFLT(English as a Foreign Language

92 Teaching) in Classroomfrom the Interactionists' Position a) Context of lanauge teaching-EFL (English as a foreign
93 language)

94 In an EFL environment, English language learners are seldom exposed to English language and also they have
95 few opportunities to speak English outside classroom. The main access to English language learning is classroom.
96 Therefore, classroom teaching takes great responsibility in helping learners achieve their various needs in English
97 language learning. And the assumptions of English teachers about language and language learning, teacher
98 and learner roles in classroom, learning activities and instructional materials are crucial to the effectiveness of
99 teaching as well as the efficiency of learning. The assumptions about these three factors constituent the teaching
100 methodology ??Richards, 2001, p.167). Next, I will explore how the interactionist's perspective on language
101 development affects the teaching methodology.

102 4 b) The Effects of Interactionist's Perspective on Teaching 103 Methodology

104 Based on the interactionists perspective on language development, effective language learning takes place in
105 social interaction. Therefore, classroom teaching should involve interactive communication, which means a break
106 down of teacher's leader position. However, we cannot expect that classroom interaction is the same as social
107 interaction. It's ideal and impossible. What we can do is to create an environment for classroom interaction.
108 Van Lier (2001, p. 91) classified classroom interaction as two broad types: teacherlearner interaction and learner-
109 learner interaction. Thus, learners are no longer the followers of the teacher. They are independent learners,
110 just like children acquiring the first language in natural settings. Spontaneous learning can be promoted in
111 classroom interaction. Next, I'll discuss the conduct of teacher-learner interaction and learner -learner interaction
112 in classroom.

113 Based on the understanding of Vygotsky's ZPD theory, both teacher-learner interaction and learnerlearner
114 interaction can promote learners' language development. After a careful examination of instructional model:
115 initiation-response-feedback, known as IRF instruction model, which is found by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975,
116 cited in McCarthy, 2002, pp. 12-18), Van Lier (2001) found that "when [IRF model] moves beyond mere recitation
117 and display, [it] can be regarded as a way of scaffolding instruction, a way of developing cognitive structures in
118 the zone of proximal development, or a way of assisting learners to express themselves with maximum clarity."
119 (p. 96) Therefore, IRF instruction model may be beneficial to language learners' cognitive development.

120 As to learner-learner interaction, cooperative learning may be a good way to carry it out. Many theorists
121 believe that in second language or foreign language learning, cooperative learning allow students to talk freely
122 and negotiate meaning with each other, which can increase the comprehensible input (Liang, Mohan & Early,
123 1998; Olsen & Kagan, 1992, cited in Jacobs & Hall, 2002, p. 53). However, before applying cooperative learning
124 to classroom, the teacher should make a careful plan, such as the size of the group, the way of forming a group,
125 noise-solving measures, etc. ??Jacobs & Hall, 2002, pp.53-58).

126 Another important interaction in classroom is the modified interaction which involves both teacherlearner
127 interaction and learner-learner interaction. According to Long (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 287), comprehensible
128 input is resulted from modified interaction. Teachers may question what is modified interaction and how should
129 we carry it out in classroom teaching? From Long's (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 287) point of view, modified
130 interaction involves various modifications created by native speakers and interlocutors which are aimed at making
131 the input comprehensible to the learner. ??rown (2000, p. 287) interpreted that modified interaction also
132 includes learners' comprehension checks, clarification/repair requests, etc. As to how to use modified interaction
133 in teaching and learning, Van Lier (2001) suggested that we can refer to "all relevant social and linguistic
134 resources" (p. 101), such as strategic moves—"let me give you an example"; backchannels—"uhuh"; repair—"Do
135 you mean X?" ??Van Lier, 2001, p. 101) By involving instructional model-IRF in classroom teaching, learners
136 can achieve a higher developmental level; and the cooperative learning and modified interaction can promote
137 the comprehensible input hence promote language learning. Therefore, classroom interaction creates a language
138 environment that can at best promote the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning.

139 From the interactionist's point of view, social interaction is crucial in language development. Therefore,
140 classroom activities and instruction materials should at best reflect the features of social interaction. Task-focused
141 activities and authentic materials work effectively in classroom interaction. It is believed that by immersing
142 students in tasks, they can negotiate meaning with each other which can promote comprehensible input also they
143 can modify their output in this process (Doughty & Willams, 1998, cited in ??ichards, 2002, p. 154).

144 The task-focused activities require that the materials adopted should be authentic and contextualized. In
145 referring to ??rawford (2002, pp. 84-86), language in teaching materials should be realistic and authentic and
146 must be contextualized; the focus of the materials should be on engaging learners in actual use of language and
147 fostering their autonomy; and various kinds of materials should be adopted to cater to individual and contextual
148 differences.

149 As to EFLT in classroom, there are some constraints that the teacher should take into account. Firstly, the
150 size of the classroom is usually relatively large. While designing classroom activities, the teacher should make
151 a careful plan in terms of the size of the class. Secondly, the teaching contexts vary. Mostly, teachers have
152 little right to decide what to teach, because usually there is a set textbook. A good way to deal with it is to
153 supplement the materials that can promote classroom interaction to classroom teaching. Thirdly, there is little
154 access to authentic materials. One of the ways to handle this problem is to use the audio or video materials in
155 teaching, which can set a shared context for the teacher and learners.

156 5 IV. Conclusion

157 The understanding towards language development has great influences on classroom teaching methodology. It
158 can influence the teacher and learner roles in classroom, the activities and the selection of instruction materials.
159 However, the influences are not constrained to these aspects of classroom teaching. It can also affect other
160 aspects, such as syllabus types. From the effects of the theories of language development, we know that every
161 innovation of theories in the field of SLA will have effect on the various aspects of teaching. Therefore, the way

5 IV. CONCLUSION

162 of teaching should be dynamic and flexible. An effective teaching demands a knowledgeable teacher and cautious practitioner. This is what we should follow in teaching.^{1 2 3}



Figure 1: How

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