



## A Brief Review: The Meeting Point of Language Learning and Translation

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### Abstract

This review article explores language learning approaches and their applicability in translation classes. Bob Hodge in his work *Teaching as Communication* stated that language, above all, holds a community together. Children learn a language implicitly without having a critical view to it. Academics such as translators and interpreters, who use the language as a professional tool, however, should view the languages more critically. Of course it is still a very controversial subject to know how people learn a language. The approaches that may be particularly applicable to adult learners are suggested and defined in this study. Some of the main approaches of learning discussed in this article include the behaviorist approach, which is considered as one of the influential ones, the cognitive approach that can be appropriate to university teaching and the innovative method, which considers students' learning styles to increase their motivation to learn.

**Keywords:** Behavioristic approach, Cognitive approach, Innovative approach, Language learning and translation, Learning competence

### INTRODUCTION

There was a time when it was common to hear the academics say, "those who can do something just do and those who cannot do anything teach". This proverb can be matched with its approximate equivalence in Persian:

" آنهایی که نمی توانند نویسندگی  
کنند ، ترجمه می کنند ، آنهایی  
که نمی توانند ترجمه کنند ،  
تدریس می کنند."

Perhaps these sort of sayings have lost their attractiveness for two reasons. First, more and more educators have realized the advantages students receive when professionals add their competence to the academic framework. Second, there are many individuals both working in their

fields and teaching in a university setting (Kiraly, 1995; Pym, 2002).

### What could instructors and translators do to improve learning?

One of the major benefits of teaching is learning at the same time (Satariyan, 2017). Instructors also learn when involving in the process of teaching students to become competent professionals. One of the common shortcoming of the novice instructors at universities, however, is to imagine their students are already expert learners. Since university student are adults, many instructors assume that their own role consists of a quick presentation of the material, applying it briefly and then moving on to a new concept. However,

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this may not be the case. In fact, students of a classroom consists of individuals with their own backgrounds, learning styles and academic levels. Instructors or translation professionals preparing to share their techniques and experience with students will find it helpful to review the basic ways it is believed that students learn.

Psychologists can investigate the ways people learn. One of the most influential explanations of the psychologists has also been the behaviorist approach. An instructor who uses this approach could break up knowledge into small, logically organized pieces of information and provide positive reinforcement for students learn to use that information.

Behaviorists emphasize repetition of material so that it becomes a natural reaction for the student.

Behaviorism has fallen from favor somewhat recently with the broadly held belief today that learning is a complex activity involving more than just repetition. Language education students and individuals who use language, however, could benefit from a certain amount of well thought – out repetition and the use of models as a basis for their writing.

A more recent explanation of how to encourage learning-the cognitive approach-is quite appropriate to university teaching as it recognizes that learning is not only the recall of facts but also involves memory, reasoning, critical thinking and problem solving techniques (Satariyan & Reynolds, 2015). According to Svinicki (2004), six principles of cognitive learning can be directly applied to learning situation (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Principles of Cognitive Learning*

Principle	Implication
Students should notice that the learning information is important to their lives.	Implication: the instructor must show the student how this information is beneficial
During the learning process, learners reflect on the information to comprehend it.	Implication: instructors and students should clarify information through examples, images, elaboration and links to prior knowledge.
Learners store information in long-term memory in an organized fashion related to their existing understanding of the world.	Implication: instructors should use an organized structure in their presentation of information.
Learners constantly check their understanding, which could result in refinement of what has been retained.	Implication: instructors should provide opportunities for the learners to be able to do so.
Transference of knowledge to new contexts does not occur automatically. It results from exposure to multiple applications.	Implication: instructors should provide links for later transfer of knowledge.
Learners who are aware of their learning strategies and monitor their learning habits will learn better.	Implication: instructors should help students become aware of how they learn.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup>. Century, the innovative method of considering student's learning styles and increasing their motivation to learn was presented. According to Gardner (2011) students learn differently and they may not all be cognitively gifted. He also stated that there are eight types of intelligence: intrapersonal, interpersonal, logical (mathematical), visual (spatial), verbal (linguistic), bodily (kinesthetic), natural and musical (rhythmic).

University instructors could apply these eight

types of intelligence to their teaching setting to involve more students in learning efficiently. For instance, if some students seem to be intrapersonal learners i.e. they prefer to work individually. Students expect their instructors to have a pause between their instructions and let the students think about the lesson and then leave a short question or comment period. Intrapersonal students want to work alone than in a group. Unlike intrapersonal learners, the interpersonal ones would prefer teamwork, oriented teaching and

small group work assignments. Some students may be visually oriented; it will be beneficial to use diagrams, charts and graphs to further back up the principles at your teaching. Students of translation who have a scientific background may benefit from the problem-solving approach. The main implication of this theory is that not all students learn in the same manner. It, however, does not signify that they cannot learn. It only means instructors should try to teach in ways that will motivate the desire to learn in as many students as possible.

Vygotsky (as cited in Bruner, 2009) believed in inner speech (i.e. the relationship between language and thought). Vygotsky (1998) also asserted that instructors should organize their teaching based on the knowledge that students already possess and move on from that point. This can help students to acquire confidence in their ability to learn. Vygotsky's point of view may be the point of focus for the classrooms where students are provided the opportunity to apply Svinick's principles. This includes considering students' differences and interests, making sure that there is both teacher-student, and student-student discussion of content (Brophy, 1997). Learner-centered classrooms can be considered fruit of the self-regulated learning principle. Learner-centered classrooms focus on students' need as the basis for classroom teaching.

The development of technology pushed the term 'life-long learning' forward to become a part of learning theories and strategies. Contemporary educators believe that all students can learn continually even after graduation. A degree or a diploma no longer signals the end of one's education. University graduates should know about the areas in which they need further improvements. Instructors could only incite students to try to make sure that they know all the most recent facts about the new additions to their profession. Motivation and learning are thus closely related. Learning may be enhanced through the intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the belief that the material being taught has a direct relationship to the real-life needs of the students.

For instance, a translation student who wants to work with an organization, e.g. the Iranian Embassy in London after obtaining a degree, will quickly grasp the necessity of knowing the intricacies of British geography—specifically the London area. The instructor will not have to insist that the student study carefully. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is for the benefit of students when they prepare an assignment. Achieving high mark, granting a scholarship, getting a high-profile internship are also examples of extrinsic motivation. Even though it is evident that a mature student should work for the intrinsic value, which learning has, extrinsic motivation can be a bonus. In fact, there are many studies (e.g. Good & Brophy, 1991) conducted about the role of motivation on learning.

The self-efficacy theory also shows that students vary in the way they evaluate their ability to learn. Some students believe they have a better ability to learn and perform at high standard. Others see themselves as slow learners, or see some unit of competencies as difficult to comprehend. They are directly influenced by their perceptions of their learning abilities and may not perform according to their potential. University instructors should consider improving students' perceptions about their own learning ability (see also Satariyan, 2017).

Postgraduate education is not the end of one's education and university instructors are not the only sources of knowledge. According to Satariyan (2017), instructors should empower the students to construct their own knowledge. How students learn a language and how to use the language in life is quite a complex subject. If you look up the word 'language' in a linguistic book index, it says the meaning needs consulting. This is not at all surprising since language do not exist in a void. Without meaning, language is gibberish (i.e. spoken and written words with no meaning and nonsense). One of the most common normative definitions of the term language could be a body of words and symbols governed by rules that tie people together into speech community (Hodge, 2002). When people of one speech

community want to communicate with those of another community, translators/interpreters are required. When methods of communication between communities are studied, education is also a factor to be considered. According to Hodge (2002), “good teaching and good learning are related to language and communication, which are inseparable” (P. 1). Translators and media specialists have the enormous responsibility of assuming the role of a bridge between communities either who have the need to communicate such as in the translation of technical texts, or who desire access to another cultural richness. Knowing the other's language as intimately as possible is the basic means of accomplishing these tasks with success.

Language study is one of the oldest domains in education (Hodge, 2002). The four basic elements of culture i.e. language, communication, translation and education have been examined since almost 1600 B.C. (Gay, 2000). It is when we first proved that linguists questioned the sources of language (Fromkin & Rodman, 2014). Although language and discussion about how people learn the language have been with us for a long time, there is still a lot we need to know. Many linguistics textbooks still use some phrases such as ‘we only know this’, ‘there is a lot we do not know’ or “yet unknown...”. Scholars try to determine how people learn a first language and what parts of that mechanism, if any, are transferred when we learn a second or third language. According to Neurolinguists (e.g. Fromkin & Rodman, 2014), “the main language centers are located in the left hemisphere of the brain” (p. 56). Broca's area, in the front, Wernicke's area in the back, and the angular gyrus, also located in the back of the brain are known to play the main role in a person's language ability (Steinberg, 1993).

As a translation instructor, it is definitely not necessary to become a Neurolinguist, but it is helpful to be aware of the factors that influence language learning and consider those as you plan for your classes. There are psychological, social and perhaps genetic factors that allow students to improve more or less than others. Specialists in

semiotics (e.g. Hodge, 2002), however, states that there are verbal and non-verbal factors influence how well students may learn languages. According to Chomsky (2002), there are certain properties of languages, which are universal (as in Table 2 below).

**Table 2**  
***Universal Properties of the Languages***

All languages are learnable
All languages share certain characteristics
All languages have rules and principles that speakers apparently follow in making sentences

Translators and Instructors of translation courses are particularly concerned with the second and the third properties (i.e. all languages share certain characteristics and all languages have rules and principles that speakers apparently follow in making sentences). If all languages share the same characteristics, instructors should help the students to recognize them and use these characteristics in their translation activities. To facilitate translation, instructors should make the rules of language available to their students, which is known as language competence. Chomsky also made a very famous distinction between language competence and language performance. Competence is just the knowledge that student possesses of the grammar of a language; performance, however, is considered the ability to produce through use of one's competence (as cited in Steinberg, 1993).

To understand how adults may become competent in language learning some researchers (e.g. Steinberg, 1993) examined the ways children acquire language. It seems that children understand their mother language before they even produce it. They pick up the rhythm, pitch, stress and melody of the language and imitate the lyrics of the language before they even speak it; first by saying single words, then two-word units, grammatically incorrect sentences and finally logical and correct expressions of meaning.

Memory can also be important. Children learn languages earlier when they are able to visualize

the object, hear their names and then store the names in their minds for further retrieval.

Fromkin and Rodman (2014) emphasized the important role creativity plays in language acquisition. Although there may be a certain primitive resemblance between human and animal language, animal language is finite and the messages are stimulus-controlled (2014). Human beings write fiction and poetry; they sing songs in duets, and in choirs. Animals obviously do not.

Chomsky's (2002) repetition and mechanical drills comprised the essence of language learning curricula. Although classroom drill was found to be insufficient, logic and communication competence are now emphasized in language learning classrooms.

Many brilliant approaches to teaching translation are applications of general learning and language learning theory. The functionalist approach to translation as explained in *Translation as a Purposeful Activity* in 1997 by Christiane Nord emphasizes the need to make the translation purposeful. Translators consider practicality as they transfer a text from one language into another.

### The last words...

In our everyday teaching of language, or language related activities e.g. translation, we can benefit from the points in this review article. Through even such a brief review, it is clear that instructors who use concrete examples, who introduce creativity into their activities and offer students opportunities to achieve success frequently, are offering interesting and beneficial experiences for their students.

According to Chomsky (2002) the universality of all languages are their learnability, characteristics, rules, and principles. He also made distinction between the language competence and performance. The former relates to the knowledge of the language that teacher should help their students to acquire the rules, skills, and the components of the language. The latter is the ability to produce the acquired competence. In conclusion, most of the significant approaches in

teaching translation courses are also implications of general learning and language learning theories.

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### **Biodata**

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