The Guidance Regarding Effective Practice in Second Language Classroom

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Abstract: Nowadays, second language acquisition arouses a heated discussion. And how can learners effectively learn a foreign language is a question worth exploring. As for teachers, they should focus on their teaching process in order to make their lessons more targeted. By contrast, for learners, they need to find some specific methods to help them learn the language. Only in this way will the learning efficiency be improved gradually. Meanwhile, positive learning atmosphere can be created. Eventually, learning a foreign language no longer is the burden but their pleasures for language learners.

Keywords: Second language learning; Effective learning; Guidance

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that teachers and learners are two participants engaging in second language classroom. Therefore, the guidance about effective learning in second language classroom can be drawn based on two directions. That is to say, even if the process of learning a foreign language is so difficult, not only teachers but also learners should take some actions to make learning much more effective. Therefore, the main body of this essay introduce six guidance in detail.

2. The guidance for teachers

2.1 Give comprehensive input to learners

To begin with, the first guidance for teachers is that they should behave as professors and impart comprehensive input to learners so as to help learners fully understand the messages they receive from teachers. Only after that, learners can learn something actively from input.

Just as Dornyei said, people learn a new language only by understanding the information that other people provide to them, or by receiving the input that can be easily understood[2]. That is to say, if teachers impart knowledge which can not be completely understood by learners, the teaching results will be terrible. At the same time, learners can not start learning a new language due to the fact that although the teachers devote themselves to teaching a foreign language, the input learners received from teachers is noneffective. For a long time, learners will feel confused and bored about what teachers said. More importantly, they might gradually lose interests in acquiring a foreign language. Therefore, just as the statement shown, "comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition"[11]. Hence, there is no denying that comprehensible input plays an important role in second language learning. Only after learners fully understand the input can they start processing the messages. On this occasion, input turns out to be intake. Moreover, according to the input hypothesis, it claims that the input students accepting not only should be comprehensible but be enough. Only in that case, students can learn some basic structure or grammar automatically without teachers teaching over and over again[8], so that learning efficiency can be improved dramatically.

According to all the statements mentioned above, there is no denying that comprehensible input should be given to learners. As for teachers, they should consider all learners' conditions before deciding how difficult the input should be. And under this circumstance, effective learning in second language classroom will be realized.

2.2 Pay more attention to individual differences

The second guidance for teachers is that they should pay more attention to individual differences in second language classroom

and apply suitable teaching methods to different occasions in order to enhance the learning efficiency.

According to Sawyer and Ranta's statement, it claims that "individuals who attempt to learn a foreign language differ dramatically in their rates of acquisition and ultimate attainment"[12]. That is to say, various success in second language acquisition can be witnessed, and one reason can account for this phenomenon; that is individual differences. There is no doubt that every individual language learner has his own differences, such as different aptitude, personality, age, intelligence and learning strategies, so they learn things in a totally different way. Therefore, if teachers do not take individual differences into consideration, only think that every learner's ability is at the same level and adopt the same teaching methods, the teaching results in second language classroom will be unsatisfactory.

Based on the handbook written by Dornyei and Skehan, it reveals that "individual differences in second language learning have generated the most consistent predictors of second language learning success"[3]. In other words, individual differences do affect the learns' performances of learning a second language. For example, some learners do well in second language acquisition because of the linguistics talents they have, the suitable age when they begin to learn a second language or the useful learning strategies they apply to. By contrast, some learners do poor in second language learning because of the less interests they enjoy during the learning process, the negative attitudes they have or the poor intelligence they have. As for teachers, it is duty to focus on every learner's differences and use effective teaching methods to help them to acquire a new language such as for those learners who are afraid of speaking, teachers should make more interactions with them in order to force them to participate in communication; for those learners who are good at linguistic learning, teachers should not only readjust their teaching plans to make lesson more reasonable, but also behave as a facilitator to encourage them to think independently, and for those learners who are not interested in linguistic phenomena, teachers should design some amusing activities to arouse their attention. In conclusion, only teachers pay more attention to the individual differences, will effective learning happen in second language classroom.

2.3 Make frequent interactions with learners

Furthermore, the final guidance for teachers is that they should make frequent interaction with learners and work as an adviser in second language classroom in order to assist learners to give over the difficulties during the learning period. In this way, second language acquisition will become much more effective than usual.

In Larsen-Freeman and Long's opinions, they think that "the role interaction plays in negotiation for meaning helps to make input comprehensible while still containing unknown linguistic elements, and potential intake for acquisition"[9]. In other words, after teachers deliver input, it is impossible for every beginner to completely understand what teachers say due to the fact that the input teachers give them may be complicated and obscure. On this occasion, interaction between teachers and learners is an useful way to make input transform to intake. More importantly, not only the teachers will know the points learners do not make sense through negotiation, but also the learners will remove their questions through constant asking.

What is more, Mackey concludes that "interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse and that provide learners with the input they need"[11]. Generally speaking, prior at the interaction, most of the learners simply receive input from teachers without thinking seriously. And only some learners begin to rethink what they have been taught and conclude the difficulties they have encountered. Only during the process of interaction will teachers give learners some extra explanations to help them to understand the difficult points. At the same time, learners start using their own knowledge learned before to process the input, so that the input becomes their own. Only after those phases, the process of second language acquisition might become further more effective.

Except that, there are a large number of other studies which mainly focus on the connection between interaction and second language development. For example, Gass and Varonis conclude that if learners are provided opportunities to interact, the latter language use will be influenced. Meanwhile, it also recognizes that negotiated interaction plays an important role on second language production as well as comprehension[5]. That is to say, learners might have a clear comprehension after several times' negotiations and modifications. According to all the viewpoints mentioned above, there is no doubt that teachers should spend a large amount of time interacting with learners in order to know their problems quickly and give them some suggestion to solve those problems. Only after several times' discussion will learners' learning performances become more effective.

3. The guidance for learners

3.1 Make full use of universal grammar

First of all, the first guidance for learners is that they should make full use of universal grammar so as to lessen the difficulty of learning a second language. Only under this circumstances will learners' learning outcome become more obvious.

To begin with, universal grammar can be viewed as "the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages the essence of human language"[7], so that if learners apply universal grammar to their second language acquisition, learning a foreign language might be much easier, because no matter what kinds of languages learners decide to learn, they all have some features in common, such as the same sentence strictures, the similar rules or the same word orders. Therefore, in that case, when learners learn some complex language phenomena, they can find some hints in their first language to help them understand the difficult points.

According to Universal Grammar and Second Language Acquisition, it points out that "universal grammar consists of principles and parameters which help to account for the child's acquisition of complex and subtle linguistic phenomena which go beyond the primary input"[13]. In other words, universal grammar can help beginners learn some difficult language structures without teachers' excessive explanation. In that case, some complicated grammars can be learned by learners without too much efforts, because learners can connect the second language with their first language and start finding some universal principles from their first language to help them understand those complex linguistic phenomena in their second language. Just as the book shown, "universal grammar give the child advance knowledge of many abstract and complex properties of language, so that these do not have to be learned solely on the basis of linguistic input or by means of general learning strategies"[13]. As long as learners take full advantage of the universal grammar, some abstract language phenomena might be learned automatically, and the learning efficiency will be increased.

3.2 Learn a second language at an early stage

What is more, the second guidance for learners is that they should take critical period into consideration and start learning a foreign language at an early stage. Only in that case can learners make better performances on second language acquisition.

According to Lenneberg's opinions, he thinks that "language could be acquired only within a critical period, extending from early infancy until puberty"[10]. In daily life, it is easy to find that children always learn something new much more quickly than adults and the elder. Facing the new things, young children show more interests and are much more willing to learning them when they are compared with adults. When it comes to second language acquisition, if learners start learning a foreign language at an early age, their responses to the input is much swifter. Moreover, young children's enthusiasm of learning is much higher, for example they can take the tasks teachers assign to them seriously, or they can imitate the pronunciation automatically. Therefore, there is no denying that critical period does impact the second language acquisition.

Based on Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis, it demonstrates that "it is tempting to believe that children are better second language learners than adults because their brains are specially organized to learn language, whereas those of adults are not"[1]. In other words, children are much more sensitive to language acquisition, and they enjoy more superiority when they are compared with adults. For example, as for memory, children can spend less time and energy reciting new words, receiving new things and remembering basic structures or grammars. In that case, much time is saved for them to learn other parts of a foreign language. In the end, learners can grasp a foreign language in a short period without spending too much energy.

Except that, an article written by Hakuta, Bialystok and Wiley reveals that "there is a biologically based critical period for second language acquisition that prevents older learners from achieving native-like competence"[6]. It is widely accepted that every learner hope to speak a foreign language not only fluently but also native-like. However, if learners do not begin to learn a second language at an early age, they might not speak a foreign language like a native speaker, because their brains are less sensitive to language itself, so that they can not receive teachers' input as quickly as young learners do. Furthermore, elder learners have poor memory so that they have to spend a long time practicing. All these factors might prevent elder learners from learning a foreign language effectively. Considering all references mentioned above, learners should try their best to start learning a second language at an early age. Only on this occasion will they enjoy more benefits than before.

3.3 Know their motivations for learning a foreign language

In addition, the final guidance for learners is that they should be aware of their motivations for learning a second language in order to encourage themselves to study hard. Generally speaking, motivation is regarded as one of the most important factors that impact learners' achievement of second language acquisition[2]. Therefore, when learners decide to learn a foreign language, the first step for them is to think about why they would like to learn a new language, for example some learners are forced to learn a foreign language due to the fact that they want to find a decent job to make living in a big city. Only after they master a foreign language will they become more competitive than other job hunters. Expect that, some learners begin to participate in second language classroom for the reason that they want to obtain a degree. Only after they get certain certificates will they become further more professional. What is more, some learners start learning a second language because of their interests, for example they would like to travel to some foreign

countries, or they are attracted by foreign culture. Just as Gardner revealed, "L2 learners with positive attitudes toward the target culture and people will learn the target language more effectively than those who do not have such positive attitude"[4]. In addition to that, some learners continue learning a foreign language, because they would like to watch a foreign movie or make friends with foreigners. Not matter what kinds of motivations they have at the beginning of learning, there is no doubt that motivations will inspire learners to insist on learning and never give up, even if the learning process is difficult. Moreover, learners with motivations may suffer from less pressure and burden, and an positive learning atmosphere may be created naturally.

To sum up, it is beneficial for learners to clearly realize their motivations and to show positive attitude towards language learning. During the process of achieving their goals, learners might feel a sense of self-worth once their objectives come true, and after that the results of second language acquisition become more effective.

4. Conclusion

Six guidance are introduced separately in this essay based on several researches on second language learning. It is believed that both teachers and learners should take some actions together to make second language learning more straightforward.

When it comes to teachers, they, as specialists, should provide comprehensible input to learners, so that learners can learn a second language in an effective way. In addition, teachers should pay more attention to every learners' individual differences in order to meet their requirements. What is more, teachers, as promoters, should continue interacting with learners in order to help them give over the difficulties they meet during the period of learning a second language. Only learners receive some useful feedback from teachers, can they start learning a foreign language more confidently.

Apart from that, learners should take full advantage of universal grammar to help them learn a second language. By relying on it, the difficulty of learning a second language can be cut down to some degree, so that learners will master a foreign language more quickly. Furthermore, learners should begin to learn a second language at an early age or during a certain period in order to make full use of some unique advantages, such as good memory, quick reaction or flexible brain. Last but not least, learners should not only show a positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language, but also clearly know what their own motivations are. And only under this circumstance can learners be encouraged not to give up no matter what difficulties they may encounter during the learning process. In conclusion, if teachers and learners try their best to take these guidance in mind and put them into use, the learning efficiency can be improved without doubt.

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