

Major Humanistic Approaches in Language Education

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Abstract

The present article is a survey of the major language teaching theories that are directly concerned with learner affect as an elemental factor that is so decisive in the success or failure of any language learning activity. The aim behind the study is to examine each of the theories, in question, in some respects: its general conception of language learner affect and the way it bears on language learning, the way it actuates learner positive affect to ensure and optimize learning, and, finally, the peculiar methods and techniques that the upholders of the theory deploy to involve and engross the learner. The track of the teaching theories makes evident that the consideration of the affective traits of the learner in the teaching activity is so promising and, so, likely to lead language teachers to stupefying achievements.

Key words: learner affect, theory, approach, method, language teaching, language learning

ملخص:

هذا المقال يرصد أهم النظريات التي تعنى بتعليمية اللغة والتي تولي اهتماما خاصاً وبالغاً لوجدان التلميذ كعامل أساسي ومحدد لنجاح أو فشل أي نشاط في تعلم اللغة. الغاية من هذا المقال هو تمحيص كل نظرية من النظريات المذكورة من حيث أولاً طريقة تفعيلها لوجدان التلميذ تفعيلاً إيجابياً يسهل عملية تعلّم اللغة، ثانياً من حيث الطرائق والتقنيات الخاصة التي تستعملها النظرية لدمج وشغل المتعلّم. يدل تمحيص النظريات المسردة في هذا المقال على أنّ العناية بالخصائص الوجدانية للمتعلّم وأخذها بعين الاعتبار في أيّ نشاط تعليمي من شأنه أن يؤدي إلى نتائج مدهشة في التحصيل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وجدان المتعلم، النظرية، المقاربة، الطريقة، تعليم اللغة، تعلّم

اللغة.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the implementation of the humanistic resolutions in the field of education has been a revolution. Great changes have occurred both at the individual as well as at the institutional levels. The new calls for the consideration, the exploration and the deployment of the affective assets of the learner inspired many educationists who acquired a strong belief that they could infer much of what could improve education. This became so evident since the early fifties of the twentieth century where those educationists innovated new teaching and learning theories all resting on purely humanistic principles. There were obviously differences among the thinkers in the way they conceived of the learner, the subject matter, the teacher, and the environment where learning takes place. These differences spawned diverse teaching and learning theories all of which converge on the relatively new affective dimension of the learner as the regulator of researchers' and practitioners' thought. Here is a short survey of the most famous humanistic language education approaches.

1. Community language learning:

Community language learning is an innovative learning mode entirely based on the counseling-learning educational model developed by Charles Curran in the early seventies. This model gives primary consideration to the affective factors in the learning process. Thus, it strongly advocates Carl Roger's view that learners are to be considered not as a 'class' but as a 'group'. In the same vein, Curran's philosophy dictates that students are to be thought of as 'clients', their needs being addressed by a 'counselor' in the form of a teacher. The relationship learner-knower (teacher) advocated by Charles Curran is inferred from and based on the relationship client-counselor put forward by Carl Rogers.

For Curran, a new learning situation presents itself with a threatening facet to the learner (adults in particular). The learner often feels threatened by the change inherent in learning and is subdued by a subsequent anxiety and fear of appearing foolish to his classmates. Curran argues that the counseling learning model would, at each learning occasion, help lower the instinctive defenses that learners throw up at moments of challenge and that the anxiety generated in the learner could be decreased through the support of an interactive community of fellow learners. Douglas Brown sees that:

In his « counselling-learning » model of education, Charles Curran was inspired by Carl Rogers's view of education in which students and teacher join together to facilitate learning in a context of valuing and prizing each individual in the group. In such surrounding, each person lowers the defences that prevent open interpersonal communication.

**The anxiety caused by the educational context is lessened
by means of the supportive community.**

(Brown, D.H. 2000. p:103-4)

Community language learning is an approach that urges the teacher to see the learners as whole persons whose feelings, intellect, interpersonal relationships, protective reactions and desire to learn are addressed and balanced. This approach heeds the delicacy of the task of upholding the learners' motivation, constant engagement and ultimate satisfaction.

Community language learning, then, assigns the teacher the role of a language counselor. He is not expected to be well-trained in psychology but to be a willing helper, always ready to understand the problems that the learners face when they attempt to acquire another language. Those problems are most of the time expressed in emotional language. The teacher-counselor is to listen to them in a nonjudgmental, supportive manner likely to earn him their trust and confidence. He will, then, be able to lay his finger on the very difficulties they meet so that he responds efficaciously in a way that would help them get aware of their difficulties and overcome them by their own.

Another important role the teacher assumes under the banner of the community language learning approach is "providing a safe environment in which clients can learn and grow." (J. Richard T. Rodgers:122) The feeling of being secure is likely to dispel all anxiety and allow the learners to direct all their attention and energy to the tasks of communication and learning rather than building and maintaining instructive defenses. This new view of teacher's role is well-summed up in Brown's description:

**The teacher's presence is not perceived as a threat, nor is it
the teacher's role to impose limits and boundaries; rather as
a "counsellor," the teacher's role is to centre his or her
attention on the clients (students) and their needs (ibid: 104)**

2. Suggestopaedia

Suggestopaedia or desuggestopaedia is a language teaching method developed by the Bulgarian psychologist Georgi Lozanov with the intent to speed up learning process. Georgi Lozanov asserts that:

**Memorization in learning by the suggestopeadic method
seems to be accelerated twenty five times over that in
learning by conventional methods.**

(Lozanov 1978 in J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers, 1986, p:142)

Suggestopaedia is a blend of suggestology and theories of education. suggestology is the "... science ... concerned with the systematic study of nonrational and/or nonconscious influences" (Stevick 1976 in Jack C. Richards and

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Theodore S. Rodgers 1986: 142) that affect human beings' responses. Theories of education include mainly "...theories of teaching, curriculum and instruction as well as the ways in which formal teaching and learning in institutional settings such as schools is planned and delivered." (Jack C. Richards and Richards Schmidt, 1985, p: 142)

In this sense, the method seems to seek to incorporate, in the teacher's pedagogical decisions, elements from the unconsciousness that could hasten the learning process, which intimates a direct concern with the learner's predisposition.

The necessity of this method in language education, up to its advocates, stems from the belief that learning failure is due to psychological barriers that the learner sets himself even before he sets on the learning process. The learner succumbs to unreasonable fears of being unable to perform and condemn all attempts to learn to failure, and so, abstains from any real self-engagement in the learning process. Diane Larsen Freeman upholds Lozanov's views in this matter and says:

The reason of our inefficiency, Lozanov asserts, is that we set up psychological barriers to learning: we fear that we will be unable to perform, that we will be limited in our ability to learn, that we will fail. One result is that we do not use the full mental powers that we have. According to Lozanov and others, we may be using only five or ten percent of our mental capacity.

(Diane Larsen Freeman 2000,p: 73)

Desuggestopaedia, as its name indicates, is basically intended to desuggest, to eliminate the psychological constraints of fear within which the learner may enclose himself. It is meant for the total liberation of the learner from the preliminary negative conception he would have borne about the difficulty and maybe the impossibility of learning, and, thus, a means for his encouragement to set on learning with hope and aspiration.

To that end, suggestopaedia attends to every element within the learning context and tries to explore and so funnel its utility to the service of learning. For the proponents of this method, every object in the learning context can have an emotional impact on the learner, so why not intervene in due time and make it of a positive impact before its repercussion would adversely engender more challenges. This is made clear by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers who say:

Suggestopaedia tries to harness these influences and redirect them so as to optimize learning. The most conspicuous characteristics of suggestopaedia are the

**decoration, furniture and arrangement of the classroom,
the use of music and the authoritative behaviour of the
teacher.**

(Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, 1986, p: 142)

Giving importance to the details of the teaching/learning context and arranging them thoughtfully in an accommodating cheerful environment is likely to optimize the learner's receptivity to the teaching material. Besides, to be really suggestopaedic in this task, the teacher is to be purposeful in the selection of the ornaments he would lay on the classroom walls. These could be colourful maps, framed grammatical rules, pictures of clusters of tagged fruits, tools and so on. The point behind this is the belief that learners can unconsciously acquire knowledge from sources they may be indirectly exposed to, in other words, through "peripheral perception." (Hansen's term 1999 in J. Arnold 1999: 223)

Another methodological cornerstone in suggestopaedia is the authoritative rather than the authoritarian type of teacher. The ideal image of the teacher in the suggestopaedic perspective is that stoic, self-contained, well-versed, well-trained and nonjudgmental person on whom learners can rely to get through the learning track. Larsen Freeman says that;

**If students trust and respect the teacher's authority, they
will accept and retain information better.**

(Diane Larsen Freeman 2000, p: 78)

A suggestopaedic teacher makes use of several trump cards to maximize learners' involvement and to optimize their learning. Among these are the use of fine arts, music, art and drama, which are proved to "enable suggestions to reach the unconscious." (ibid, p: 80) and the use of fantasy which consists in detaching learners from their past learning experiences and giving them new names from the target culture, and new characters to roleplay. This playfully enhances learning and "reduces barriers to learning." (ibid)

The constant concern of the suggestopaedic teacher should, then, be to lower the affective filter to minimal level using the unconscious means which address the unconscious of the learner without any intermediary, to ensure the utmost of his receptivity. The teacher's work is always under the banner which upholds that the utmost affective readiness is a prerequisite to learning to take place.

3. Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response is a language teaching method developed by the psychologist James Asher. It is a method based on the premise that language learning should start with listening and understanding per se and proceeds later with producing. Asher's theory seems to be inspired by the movement in foreign language teaching known as the Comprehension Approach which has spawned

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several comprehension teaching methods all of which share, up to Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, a set of principles as:

- **Comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language.**
- **The teaching of speaking should be delayed until comprehension skills are established.**
- **Skills acquired through listening transfer through other skills.**
- **Teaching should emphasize meaning rather than form.**
- **Teaching should minimize learner stress.**

(Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, 1986, p: 87-88)

Total Physical Response advocates a type of learning which combines language listening skill with motor responses. The most used initial technique in this method consists in commands given by the teacher to learners who respond to them by actions without any verbal reaction. The teacher starts by giving simple single commands which he himself models in front of the learners. The learners listen to the teacher and imitate him. Later the teacher gives commands without modelling them and checks the learners' understanding through their performance. Errors in performance show misunderstanding and call for the teacher's intervention to correct them in an unobtrusive manner. The teacher does not move onto any new command until understanding of the given commands is firmly ensured. The sense of successful understanding and performance gives the learners self-confidence and prods them to advance through their learning track. The teacher is, then, to combine commands in a funny way as "jump to the board and touch the board," for language learning can be made fun.

In the first phase of the learning process, the learners only observe and perform. They are not to produce any verbal response. The concern of this method is to develop learners' understanding. Learners are not asked to begin to speak until they are ready, in other words, until they show evidence of immediate memory connection between linguistic elements and motor performance. At that moment, the teacher hands over the task of giving commands and performing together to learners.

What makes Total Physical Response an openly affective language teaching method is its concern with the liberation of the learner from stress and anxiety. This method caters for the delicacy of the learner's emotions in the learning enterprise. The learner's emotional state is heeded right since the beginning of the teaching process. The commands set for the learners are cautiously kept within the learners' understanding potential. Commands are occasionally made zany to make of learning enjoyable fun. The teacher ensures the learners' full assimilation of the already practised commands before launching

new ones to ensure their feeling of success that is likely to prod them to be receptive to more commands. Learners are not asked to speak until they show evident readiness to do spontaneously and willingly; compelling them to speak before they are ready to do would miscarry. All these considerations make Total Physical Response a purely humanistic teaching approach. Diane Larsen Freeman says in this vein:

One of the main reasons Total Physical Response was developed was to reduce the stress people feel when studying foreign languages. One of the primary ways this can be accomplished is to allow learners to speak when they are ready. Forcing them to speak before then will only create anxiety... another way to relieve anxiety is to make language learning as enjoyable as possible... feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.

(Diane Larsen Freeman 2000, p: 114)

4. The Silent Way

The Silent Way is a language teaching method developed by Caleb Gattegno. Its name is derived from the principle it is based on. Gattegno believes that the teacher taking up this method is to keep silent as long as possible while the learner should be the most productive in the target language he can. Most of the teaching is in the material used. The teacher contents himself with presenting the language item in a coloured word chart commonly known among educationalists as Fidel Chart¹. The Teacher hangs the chart on the wall or the board and guides the learners' pronunciation nonverbally through the use of coloured rods commonly known as Cuisinaire rods² in which the pronunciation elements of the target language are coloured and already inculcated in the learners' minds on basis of the phonological system of the mother tongue.

Fidel chart and Cuisinaire rods and a pointer are the basic tools the Silent Way teacher uses to introduce the vocabulary as well as the structure of the target language. Keeping as silent as possible, this kind of teacher makes use of a pointer to lead the learners' perceptual and analytical powers to discover the item they are to learn.

The concern of the Silent Way with the learners' affect can be inferred from some of its basic tenets. The starting point in any silent-way lesson should be a data pre-acquired by the learner. This is set as a base upon which the learning of novelties is built. With freshers, this base may consist of elements in the first language, as in the elementary schools. The introduction of the learners to the foreign-language-sound system has to be grounded on their knowledge and ability

¹ named after its discoverer Fidel M.J.

² named after their first user the European educator Georges Cuisinaire

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to manipulate the sound system they already have i.e. that of their native language. For the learners who have already had some experience in the foreign language, the required foundation could be made up of items in the target language itself. Since they are already familiar with some basic notions in the language to learn, they can make use of their already-known items to discover the unknown. The founder of this method insists on this requisite reckoning the importance of the positive receptivity of the learner as a ineluctable condition to any learning to take place. The learner must feel the accessibility of the content that he will go through. This feeling is likely to dispel all anxiety from the learner's mind and involve him fully in a learning that he feels able to undertake and get through smoothly.

The silence to which this approach confines the teacher plainly intimates the commitment of learners to undertake the task of their own learning. The Silent-Way teacher directs the learners nonverbally to the activity they are to perform; he does not model anything; thus, it is the learners who are to make choices. They are to make use of their perceptual and analytical powers to make the right choices. In fact they rely on what they already know to decide about what they do not yet know. It is precisely through this freedom of choice that the learner is given the possibility of self-growth. The teacher's reluctance, the learners' free will, choice, decision and self-growth altogether converge on the importance that the Silent Way attaches to the affective construct of the learner as his most effective driver towards success.

The teacher's silence in this method serves another cause besides self-growth; it is self-awareness. The teacher's evaluative feedback in most language teaching methods is said to have a very important effect on the learners' performance. A positive feedback from the teacher may be an incentive to a learner's activity just as a negative feedback may frustrate all initiative from his part. However, the view of the teacher's evaluative role in the Silent Way is particularly different. The teacher under its banner is advised to never praise the learners for positive performance nor to criticize them for wrongdoing. This teacher's particular stance is advocated to drive the learners to develop their own inner criteria; criteria which would assist them in all the decisions they may have to make. They would constantly serve them as a monitor and hence, allow them to get aware of their own blunders and so to self-correct. The firmer inner criteria a learner develops, the further he will reach towards the realization of his own potentials.

The affective concerns of the Silent Way are succinctly elucidated by Gattegno.

**To speak... requires the descent of the will into the
voluntary speech organs and a clear grasp by one's linguistic
self of what one is to do to produce definite sounds in**

definite ways. Only the self of the utterer can intervene to make objective what it holds in itself. Every student must be seen as a will capable of what work.
(Gattegno 1976 in Richards J. C. and Rodgers T. S. 1986: 102)

Conclusion

To round up the main gist of what has been seen in this article, the consideration of affect as an elemental factor in the human nature has progressively gained ground in the field of education. Educationists recognized its importance and, accordingly, incorporated it in the educational practices, language learning and teaching in particular.

The consideration of learner affect by educational psychologists led them to dig deep in the learner's psyche and explore the affective factors that have direct or indirect bearings on language learning. This allowed them to discover plenty of interesting things. They could eventually distinguish, in the individual learner, a set of stable personality traits, changeable qualities and dispositions to external interaction. These discoveries proved of great benefits, since they allowed educational psychologists to approach the individual language learner from different angles to ensure his affective disposition to learning first then proceed in teaching him the target language. Plain evidence of this is in the elaboration of entire teaching and learning methods conspicuously designed to cater for the affective component of the learner.