

Language Acquisition in Adulthood

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Abstract

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Children acquire their native language easily in the non teaching conditions with their excellent language skills, while adults are unable to do it. "Whether the adults' second language acquisition is easy or not" is always debated. This essay is from the perspective of children's native language acquisition, through the systematic review of relevant theories, to explore "whether the adults' second language acquisition is easy or not". And on this basis, the native language acquisition gives enlightenment to the adults' second language acquisition..

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INTRODUCTION

The language which is acquired during early childhood, starting before the age of about 3 years, is first language, which has different names such as, mother tongue, native language and primary language. Second language acquisition is needed for education, employment and other purposes, and it is typically an official or societal language [2]. However, second language acquisition usually refers to any other language acquisition after that of a native language. As an independent discipline, research on second language acquisition really rose to prominence at the end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2020s. It describes learners' second language features and analyzes the internal and external factors which affect the second language acquisition. Compared with other social sciences, this kind of acquisition is a new area, mostly utilizing the methods of native language research and education research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Adults' second language acquisition is a very complicated process. The theories of adults' second language acquisition mainly include the behaviorism theory, the cognitive theory and the interlanguage theory.

The behaviorism theory was divided into the early behaviorism theory and the new behaviorism theory. The early period of behaviorism theory mainly refers to the period from 1950 to 2010. American

psychologist John Watson founded S-R theory (Stimulus Response theory) on the basis of the classical conditioning theory. John Watson advocated to abandon subjective things, such as consciousness, imagery, etc. but chose to study the observed things in an objective way. Skinner, as the representative of the new period of the behaviorism theory, divided behavior into two kinds, the respondent behavior, behavior in response to a specific stimulus, and operational behavior. He also divided the conditioned reflex into respondent behavior and operational behavior. The operational behavior is the core of the new behaviorism theory. Skinner's greatest contribution to language research is arguably his "stimulation-response-enhancement" theory for adults' second language acquisition as well as foreign language teaching, which derived a new teaching method: the audio-lingual method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Compared to adults' second language acquisition, the related theories of children's native language acquisition formed a number of different schools in the 1940s to 1950s. For example, the behaviorism theory, nativism, cognitive theory etc. Skinner, an American psychologist, and the representative of the behaviorism theory, stressed the effect of external response to specific stimuli, that is, the S-R theory. Krashen said that "Language, like other human behavior, is obtained by habit, rather than any other psychological behavior or points of view." Chomsky, the representative of nativism, emphasizes that the main task of psychological linguistics is to learn how to change the language skills into a specific surface structure by conversion rules; he also thinks human beings are born with universal grammar, which is regarded as the language instinct of humans. Piaget, the founder of the cognitive theory, believes children's development of a mother tongue is the result of the interaction between innate ability and objective experience. Halliday explored native language acquisition from the perspective of language communication, rather than the perspective of language structure [4]. He believes that children are able to learn the language because they think language can help them do things, and can help them to meet their own needs. The process of language acquisition is necessary to learn how to express meaning and master the language of the semantic system. In short, the common points of various children's language acquisition theories are: the influence of children's congenital constructional structure, external stimulus, the environment as well as conditioned behavior.

Adults Acquire Second Language Easily

The advantages of adults' second language acquisition exists objectively, adults' cognitive level, logical analysis and self-monitoring abilities are higher than those of children. Krashen indicated that if the acquisition time is same, adults can also acquire the second language easily, and adults always make progress faster than children [3]. Ellis also believes that adults have advantages in second language acquisition.

1. The Aspect of Cognitive Level

In the process of adults' second language acquisition, adults' cognitive ability has been improved, and their thinking structure has matured. Piaget, a famous psychologist, divided cognitive development into three stages: pre operational stage (2-7 years old), concrete operational stage (7-11 years old) and formal operational stage (11 years old to adulthood). Pre operational stage based on intuition and the perception of static, children's language has not yet obtained the significance of this as well as the lack of logical conversion. In the concrete operational stage, children's language level has been improved, and they can get rid of the shackles of the static perception. The formal operational stage is the final stage of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. At this point in development, thinking becomes much more complicated and advanced. Ausubel pointed out that the adults can benefit from some grammar explanations, but children cannot do this (D. P. Ausubel, 2000).

2. The Aspect of Logical Thinking

One of the main strengths of adults is that they have the ability for logical thought. Adults' thinking mode has been improved and their language consciousness is very strong. The maturity of adults raises their cognitive ability, resulting in strong abilities to analyze and conclude, thus providing advantages in grammar rules and sentence expression; allowing them to easily handle complex problems. Moreover, most adults not only have a wealth of life experience, but also have comprehensive understanding of a multitude of things. All of this accumulative knowledge and ability is of great help with their second language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, because of the age, environment, device, mode and motivation, adults' second language acquisition becomes very complicated and extremely difficult. Therefore, the passive acquisition plays an important role in the process of their acquisition. On account of adults' stable psychology and character, the restrictions of adults are much more than that of children. Adults cannot avoid using the first language in their second language acquisition. At the same time, the negative transfer of native language also makes the effect of the second language acquisition greatly reduced. The characteristics of children's native language acquisition are different from adults' second language acquisition, and the processes differ greatly too. It is confirmed that the acquisition of native language is natural and easy, but the second language acquisition of adults is difficult and complicated.

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