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Implication of Theories of Learning in Teaching Grammar in Libyan Schools

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ABSTRACT

It is totally believed that any teaching method is successful when it is associated with other factors, amongst of which are teachers themselves and learners. Hence, this paper is directed to investigate about the implication of theories of learning on teaching. Yet, we should not ignore the role of linguistic theories in learning and teaching foreign languages. So, this paper presents some literature review regarding learning and the most prominent theories of learning. It is worth mentioning that linguistic theories have passed three interrelated stages, represented in traditional grammar, structuralism, and functionalism, which all led to emergence of new language teaching methods. So, this paper is directed in general to implication of theories of learning, specifically behaviorisms, cognitivism, constructivism, structuralism, and functionalism in teaching methods. This paper is focused mainly on teaching grammar in the Libyan settings. The paper concludes that as language is a social activity used for communication, teaching English in Libya should be directed to how to use language in communicative situations. So, the paper recommends functionalism theory of learning as a theory teacher use in teaching grammar in Libyan schools.

Introduction

People use language as a way of communication to express ideas, beliefs, thoughts, as well as, to give information and facts about the reality. To do so, people need to use a language that is understood by the parties involved in the conversation. As we are living in a globalized world, in which people contact with each other easily and effectively, using an international language has become a must. This international language, with no doubt, is English, which is considered as the lingua franca in the 21st century.

Accordingly, learning English has become a tool of success and contacting with the people in this era. Learning a language, however, does not mean that a learner memorizes vocabulary and grammatical rules only, but it also requires knowing about the language's culture and using this language in various communicative situations. Learning language requires learners not only knowing about language, but it also requires them using language in communicative situations. Thus, the role of teachers of language is not to teach learners language only, but it also evokes them to use language in authentic situations.

Talking about teaching entails talking about learning as teaching and learning are two faces of the same coin. They are interrelated in a way that one can never fulfill unless the other is fulfilled successfully. So, this paper works out to investigate about the influence of theories of learning on teaching methods, and how teachers of language can benefit from theories of learning in teaching language. This paper, however, is restricted to teaching grammar in the Libyan schools.

Literature Review

To conduct this paper, a literature review regarding the topic of the study is required. In this part, the researcher is presenting some information and facts regarding the topic of the study to be used *per se*.

Studies and research in the field of language learning and language teaching reveal that a set of standard rules serves as a very useful tool for both language teachers and language learners. Also, various studies and research show that learners of English in general, and Libyans in specific, encounter various challenges in learning and using grammar properly and effectively. These studies and research attribute this failure to some reasons, amongst of which is mother tongue interference. Studies show that some Arab learners of English, for example, use Arabic structure to speak English. Hence, in this part, the researcher is presenting some aspects in grammar in general and learning English grammar in specific. For the purpose of this paper, this part presents facts and information on grammar and learning. Later, the researcher works to see how theories of learning assist in teaching grammar in Libyan schools.

Grammar

It is a matter of fact that grammar is core in speaking a language. People become helpless to use language unless they are aware of its structure, represented in its grammar. Wilkins (Cited in Omar, 2019a, p. 19) emphasizes that “without grammar, very little can be conveyed”. In its narrower sense, grammar consists of morphology, which is the study of the internal structure of words, and syntax, which is the study of structural order of words in a sentence. Hence, Andrews (1993), sees that grammar “usually refers to a description of how words and phrases normally relate to each other in oral or written sentences in a language” (p. 152). Whereas, Goodman (1986) portrays grammar as a system that includes a finite set of grammatical rules people use to generate infinite number of utterances and sentences.

In its wider sense, grammar contains, in addition to morphology and syntax, phonology, which is the study of sound; semantics, which is the study of meaning; and pragmatics, which is the use of language in reality. This indicates that grammar gives shape, function, and meaning to the surface structure of a sentence in a particular context. In this vein, Aitchison (2003) claims that “around the central grammatical hub comes pragmatics, which deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone” (p. 9). Aitchison’s claim is supported by Kozulin (1986), who argues that “behind words, there is the independent grammar of thought, the syntax of word meanings” (p. 222).

Accordingly, grammar gives not only function, but also meaning to people’s utterances and sentences. Without grammar meaning becomes unclear and distorted. In this regard, Chomsky (2006) sees grammar as a “system of rules that specifies the sound–meaning relation for a given language” (p. 91). For that reason, Omar (2018b) describes language as “a system of symbols includes sounds (phonology) and syntactic structures (grammar) for communication with people, who use the same vocal symbols in forms of speech and syntactic structures in forms of sentences” (p. 379).

Grammar, according to Chomsky (2006), produces non-finite number of structural descriptions, and each structural description generates a specific abstract object of one sort or another for the sake of determining “a particular sound, a particular meaning, and whatever formal properties and configurations serve to mediate the relation between sound and meaning” (pp. 91-92). This indicates that each language has a specific set of rules that serve specific functions, which Chomsky calls as parameters, and general rules and functions, which Chomsky calls principles.

It is true that grammar is core in language because, as Omar 2019c believes, grammar helps language users draw a framework to make their utterance understood by others. So, grammar, according to Omar (2019c), “helps people reveal what words mean in different structural and semantic contexts” (p. 217). Grammar for language is just like the backbone to the human body. Learning a language, then, starts from learning its grammar. Chomsky (2006) claims that grammar determines how words are ordered in structures to convey meaning. Of course, the order of the words in a sentence changes the meaning of the sentence. For example, “John loves Ann” has a different meaning from “Ann loves John.”

Types of Grammar

However, when we talk about grammar, it is worth mentioning that there are various types of grammar; each has a specific function and use. In this paper, the researcher is focusing on some types of grammar he sees that they may serve the purpose of this paper.

1. Traditional Grammar

In its broad sense, traditional grammar indicates the principles of historical comparative studies of languages, emphasizing the ways of changes that take place on different languages and how to use language objectively. In its narrow sense, traditional grammar indicates the theories of grammar that are originated from Latin and Roman languages and used to be taught in teaching foreign languages, more specifically German and English. This type of grammar generated what is called grammar translation method, which focuses on teaching grammar through translating from one language into another (Yin, 1990). So, the main purpose of teaching or learning traditional grammar can be summed up in the following points:

- a. Learners become successful if they know how to read materials in a foreign language or translate a text from one language into another;
- b. It is not a goal that learners can communicate in the foreign language in communicative situations;
- c. Learners are passive learners as the classroom is teacher-centered, where teachers do everything in classroom;
- d. Learners use their native language in order to understand and use grammar of the foreign language; and
- e. Learners grasp and understand grammar out of their contexts.

2. Descriptive Grammar

Descriptive grammar is the grammar used by native speakers in reality without even being aware of what they are saying. Leech, Deuchar, and Hoogenraad (2006) argue that descriptive grammar is a non-judgmental approach as it is not used to produce what concerned as a bad or good language. Hence, native speakers are not concerned whether what they say is correct or incorrect. For example, native speakers may say "There is some chairs in the classroom", using singular verb with plural.

According to Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), descriptive grammar has a function of simplifying the language through using language without being bothered whether what they are saying is grammatically correct or incorrect. The most important aspect is that native speakers accept and understand of what is said. The focus here is on fluency rather than accuracy.

3. Prescriptive Grammar

In contrast to descriptive grammar, prescriptive grammar is concerned with how grammar should be used. So, it is concerned with correct and incorrect grammar. So, the sentence "There is some chairs in the classroom" is grammatically incorrect, and the correct grammatical structure is either "There are some chairs in the classroom" or "There is a chair in the classroom." Prescriptive grammar, then, is an approach of grammar that is concerned with the correct usage of grammatical structures to form correct usage of language in reality and determines the objective of using grammar in setting grammatical rules that enforce language users to use correct grammatical rules and avoid the incorrect ones.

4. Pedagogical Grammar

Pedagogical grammar is concerned with how grammar is used in education for teaching learners how to use grammar in communicative situations. Imssalem (2001) defines pedagogical grammar as "the application of the linguistic theories to language teaching" (p. 42). This indicates that pedagogical grammar is concerned with how teachers teach grammar and how learners use grammar in communicative situations. In this regard, Bell (1981) claims that pedagogical grammar aims at presenting an existing model in a way to provide teachers or syllabus designers with "the access to the theoretical insights of the descriptive grammar in order to form the bases of language teaching syllabuses and materials" (p. 30).

Pedagogical grammar, based to Omar (2019c), is "used for the purpose of enhancing and promoting foreign language learners to acquire language prescriptively and to solve the problems that foreign language learners encounter while learning the foreign language" (p. 218). Pedagogical grammar includes (1) pedagogical process, which indicates the overt treatment of fundamentals of the target language system as part of language teaching methodology; (2) pedagogical content, which indicates the reference sources of one type or another of presenting information about the target language system; and (3) combinations of process and content, in which pedagogical grammar increases the learner's comprehension of the target language structures (Little, 1994).

Learning

Actually, when we talk about learning, we find ourselves talk about teaching. There is no learning without teaching, and there is no teaching without learning. Each complements the other in one way or another. Learning and teaching is like selling and buying or exporting and importing as one is fulfilled when the other is fulfilled. In other words, one can never

happen unless the other happens. Learning language, moreover, does not mean knowing only about language, but it also requires using language in reality. In this regard, Alexander (Cited in Omar, 2019b) claims that learning a language “is not a matter of acquiring a set of rules and building a large vocabulary. The teacher’s efforts should not be directed at informing his students about language, but at enabling them to use it. A student’s mastery of a language is ultimately measured by how well he can use it, not how much he knows about it” (p. 520).

Based on Chomsky’s universal grammar theory, people are born with knowledge in a form of abstract thought, which is called competence, and they need to transfer this knowledge into utterance in reality, which is called performance. Hence, people have knowledge, and they need a way or another to transfer this knowledge into utterance. The process of transferring might be conducted through learning, however.

Similar to Chomsky, Clark and Mayer (2008) claim that learning is the process of refreshing and recalling abstract knowledge that has already stored in a learner’s brain to be associated with the experiences the learner meets in reality. Associating existing knowledge with actual experiences is a process of language acquisition enhanced by language learning. So, learning a foreign language requires learners to develop their abilities to effectively communicate with native speakers of that language in real communicative situations. That is what Nunan (2004) calls as “experiential learning” or “learning by doing” (p. 12), whereas, King and Mackey (2007) describe learning language as “paying attention to what others are doing” (p. 87).

However, Goodman (1986) defines language learning as “a process of social and personal invention. Each person invents language all over again in trying to communicate with the world” (p. 18). Similarly, Andrews (1993) asserts that “instead of learning only the basic syntactical patterns of the language, the school student also needs to learn about the social facts that affect his or her language options” (p. 38). This indicates the interrelation between language learning or acquisition and social interaction in communicative situations.

Hence, Barnes (1992) claims that “no teacher can afford to ignore the influence of social context upon learning” (p. 96). Halliday (Cited in Gilles and Pierce, 2003) believes that learning takes place in interaction with other users of language in reality through three stages: learning language, learning through language, and learning about language. This indicates that in addition to acquiring and learning abstract knowledge either from birth, in the case of language acquisition, and in school, in the case of language learning, social interaction plays a significant role in enhancing language acquisition and language learning as language needs to be practiced and communicated in reality with others.

The idea of social interaction is enhanced by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, in which he emphasizes the role of social interaction in building knowledge. Vygotsky uses the concept Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined by Blau (2003) as “the zone where genuine learning takes place as learners use the assistance of others to achieve what they are just about capable of achieving on their own, but can’t quit achieve without such assistance” (p. 161).

ZPD, in fact, is essential in language learning as it enhances learners to show progress through scaffolding when interacting with others in real communicative situations. Social learning can happen formally in classroom or informally in the environment through taking learners to environments where they can practice the language with native speakers.

So, in contrast to language acquisition, Newby (2006) asserts that in the process of language learning, learners have to be conscious for the explanation of the grammatical rules by the teacher before the practice stage as learning plays a crucial part for students to develop their grammatical system for further knowledge. Hence, Krashen (1982) recommends teachers to encourage learners to learn grammar in typical formal classrooms through “a conscious process of study and attention to form and error correction” (p. 27). To do so, there are several theories of learning a teacher might imply to teach grammar in classroom.

Theories of Learning

There are various theories of learning language, and each serves a specific purpose and works effectively in a specific situation and setting. For the purpose of this paper, the researcher is presenting the most popular and used ones.

1. Behaviorism Theory

In the late 1950s and beginning of 1960s, there was a hot debate whether language is innate and a mental system, supported by Chomsky, or language is social and a behavioral system, supported by Watson and Skinner. While Chomsky used concepts such as “mind” and “innate”, emphasizing the role of innate system in learning language, Watson and Skinner used concepts such as “know” and “think”, emphasizing the role of stimulus and response in learning language.

Chomsky bases his ideas on that people utter and understand sentences they have not heard or used before, and children develop complex grammatical rules without formal instructions in school.

The roots of behaviorism theory, in fact, dates back to the late of the 1950s by Watson, who first highlighted the role of verbal behavior in learning through imitation, drill, and repetition. So, the basis of this theory stands on analyzing and observing learners' behavior through stimulus-response interaction. Lado (1964) notices that "all learning takes place through the same underlying process, habit formation. Learners receive linguistic input from speakers in their environment and positive reinforcement for their correct repetition and imitations. As a result, habits are formed" (p. 30).

In the first of the 20th century, Watson and Skinner characterized learning language as a behavioral system of response to physical stimuli through operant conditioning, habit formation, and positive reinforcement, which all are enhanced and strengthened through sound drill and mimicking. Skinner presented behaviorism theory of learning in 1960s basing on seeing learning as a change in learners' behavior enhanced by positive reinforcement for correct answers and repetition for correct learning.

The basic idea of behaviorism theory bases on the process of error and trial, in which positive reinforcement enhances correct imitation or positive interaction and lack of reinforcement or obstruction follows incorrect imitation or negative interaction. Accordingly, learners enhance their positive interaction and improve or amend their negative interaction (Rivers, 1986). The theory, moreover, is based on sound drill through repetition based on the idea that talking has priority over writing. Children start learning to talk before they start learning to write.

Dai and Chen (2007) see that the behaviorism theory of learning is based on the following principles: (1) language learning is habit formation; (2) mistakes make bad habits and become hard to eliminate later, so they should be avoided and corrected from the beginning; (3) sound drill is core in learning language, so language skills are learned more effectively orally first then in written form; (4) correspondence is a better foundation for language learning than analysis; and (5) learners should learn meaning of words in a linguistic and cultural context.

2. Cognitivism Theory

This theory came in the late 1960s as a reaction against behaviorism theory. In contrast to behaviorism, which is based on observable and measured behavior, cognitivism is based on what happens in the learner's mind. So, this theory sees that learning is developed by biology and development. This theory is based mainly on Chomsky's Universal Grammar Theory, in which he sees that people are born with knowledge in brain. Chomsky believes that brain is the center of data, and mind is the device used to convey these data into reality. Chomsky, also, used the proposition of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) for acquiring the first language, and he used it as a reaction against Skinner's theories of imitation and operant conditioning. Chomsky (Cited in Lightbown and Spada, 1999) claims that "children's minds are not blank slates to be filled merely by imitating language they hear in the environment; instead, he claimed that children are born with a special ability to discover for themselves the underlying rules of a language system" (p. 16).

Nelson (2013) agrees with Chomsky in using mind as a device for learning and acquiring languages. Also, Mclaughin (1987) argues that this theory serves the enhancement of the learning system used for learning or acquiring a second or foreign language. Learners focus on the knowledge they have already had or learned, and they then produce and practice this knowledge with other in the community without being noticed of doing so.

Chomsky bases his idea on cognitive theory on the idea of children's acquisition of their first language. Chomsky (Cited in Brown, 2000) argues that "we are born with a genetic capacity that predisposes us to a systematic perception of language around us, resulting in the construction of an internalized system of language" (p. 24). This indicates that linguistic behavior is not learned, but it is innate. Hence, children are biologically programmed for learning and acquiring language, and language, according to Lightbown and Spada (1999) "develops in the child in just the same way that other biological functions develop" (p. 15).

3. Constructivism Theory

Constructivism theory views learning as a nonlinear, interpretive, and recursive process enhanced through active interacting with the physical and social surroundings in the real environment. Constructivism prevails from other former theories of learning: cognitivism and behaviorism. The founder of this theory is the Swiss psychologist Piaget, who focuses on construction in developing knowledge through social interaction for learning languages. In general, there are two types of constructivism theory: cognitive constructivism theory and sociocultural constructivism theory.

In one hand, cognitive constructivism theory sees learning as an active process in which a learner constructs new concepts and ideas basing on his knowledge accumulated in his brain in the past. Later, the learner develops skills to choose the information and assumptions for making decisions to integrate learning experiences in the real world with the existing knowledge in his brain. Based on Piaget (Cited in Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006), cognitive constructivism is a “holistic, bottom-up process” (p. 169) enhanced by constructing knowledge in brain. This theory sees that learning contains spiral and successive stages, in which a learner’s personal mental activities influence on his brain growth in order to understand and explore his experiences in reality (Goodman, 1990).

Sociocultural constructivism theory, on the other hand, focuses on the role of social experiences in the real world in developing the knowledge in the brain. Vygotsky developed this theory, in which he emphasized the role of social context in learning, presenting his famous concept ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more knowledgeable others” (p.86). This indicates that a learner develops his mental cognition through interacting with other people in the real world, which is called scaffolding.

Based on Vygotsky, social and cultural contexts affect heavily on a learner’s cognition and develop his higher cognitive processes to interact with people in the real world. So, these cognitive processes have fundamental cognitive activities in the learner’s brain to be transferred as social activities practiced in the social contexts in the learner’s culture, where he grows up through the process of ‘internalization’. In this process, learners participate in interpersonal interactions with other people in the community and shape their ways of thinking and behaving, and “they become transformed from being social phenomena to being part of his or her own intrapersonal mental functioning” (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p. 193).

4. Structuralism Theory

De Saussure, the Swiss linguist, put the grounds of structuralism when he presented his concept ‘structural linguistics’, in which he refers that structural linguistics is concerned with the recognition of language as “a patterned system composed of interdependent elements rather than a collection of unconnected individual items” (Aitchison, 1974, p. 21). De Saussure focuses on structure rather than meaning, emphasizing that meaning of words can be captured through identifying the arrangement or structure of elements in a sentence. So, a learner can understand and learn language through analyzing the units of language, starting from sounds (allophone), the smallest unit, and go further till the context, the largest unit.

In his book *Language* in 1933, American linguist Bloomfield was influenced by De Saussure and put the beginning remarks of structuralism, basing on the idea of describing human language according to its structural characteristics (Brown, 2000). Bloomfield presented his concept ‘IC Analysis’, in which he analyzes sentences based to their constituents. For example, “Ali talked with the girl in the kitchen” might have three or four constituents with different meanings. The first IC Analysis is “Ali / talked / with the girl in the kitchen” which indicates that Ali talked with the girl who was in the kitchen. The structure of this sentence is Subject + verb + complement object. The other IC Analysis is “Ali / talked / with the girl / in the kitchen” which indicates that Ali talked with the girl in the kitchen. The structure of this sentence is Subject + verb + object + adverb of place.

5. Functionalism Theory

Functionalism has been originated by Hymes as a reaction against structuralism. Hymes rejected Chomsky’s theory of language competence and presented his theory of communicative competence. So, in contrast to Chomsky, who focuses on language as a hidden system in brain, Hymes focuses on language as a communicative system used with others in communicative situations. Hymes (Cited in Wen, 1999) presented his theory of communicative competence, in which it includes four parts as: probability, practicability, accuracy, and effectiveness.

During the 1980s, Canale and Swain contributed to enhance Hymes’s communicative competence theory, presenting four aspects of skills and knowledge as: (1) Linguistic competence, which refers to the innate grammar a speaker uses to generate utterance; (2) Sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the speaker’s ability to comprehend and interact with other people’s speech in the real world; (3) Discourse competence, which refers to the speaker’s ability to capture of the context; (4) Strategic competence, which refers to the speaker’s ability to use various communicative meaning of strategies based on the discourse in which the language is used.

Firth and Halliday, the British linguists, emphasized the relationship between the structure of language and the context in which the language is used. Firth, influenced by De Saussure, considers language as a semiotic system that requires a context of culture and a situation to work. Whereas, Halliday, influenced by Vygotsky, considers language as a social phenomenon that exists in a social context. Language, for Halliday, is a socio-semiotic system embedded in its culture and used for functional purposes in various communicative situations.

Halliday (1978) claims that linguistics is concerned with describing texts or speech acts, so linguists study functions of language in which the focus is on meaning rather than on structure. In this way, Halliday presents seven fundamental functions of language as: the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational. These functions, however, motivate and empower learners to learn language when they acquired and used in communicative situations.

Halliday presented the concepts 'function', 'system', and 'choice', which, in addition to the concepts 'culture', 'text' and 'context', constitute the basis of his theory 'systematic functional linguistics'. In this theory, Halliday (1975) considers language as a social semiotic that works out within a social context in a specific cultural context. This indicates that "a child, in the act of learning language, is also learning the culture through language and the semantic system which he is constructing becomes the primary mode of transmission of the culture" (pp. ix-x).

Implication of Theories of Learning on Teaching Grammar

As we mentioned earlier that teaching method does not work alone as there are other interrelated factors that make the teaching method used successful or unsuccessful. In the previous part, the researcher highlights the most common theories of learning. In this part, the researcher is trying to see how to imply these theories of learning on the teaching methods used in the Libyan settings to teach grammar.

1. Behaviorism Theory

As we have seen in the previous part, behaviorism theory is a psychological theory of learning, basing mainly on mimicking, practice, positive reinforcement, and habit formation. In this theory, teachers use testable, measured, and observable behaviors, such as examinations, to assess learners and give grades as positive reinforcement to enhance positive behaviors. In teaching, teachers focus on sound drill and tangible performance to enhance learners' learning. So, it is required that teachers use well-structured curricula in order to find appropriate ways to assess learners pedagogically in a way to motivate them to learn.

Regarding the use of this theory in teaching, Lightbown and Spada (1999) show how learners learn as they imitate the sounds and patterns which they hear around them and receive positive reinforcement (which could take the form of praise or just successful communication) for doing so. Thus, encouraged by their environment, they continue to imitate and practice these sounds and patterns until they form 'habits' of correct language use. (p. 9)

Though this theory gained some popularity in the United States and Europe in the 1960s, it has had some shortcomings. This theory has been proven not qualified enough to encourage learners to learn language outside classroom as they base mainly on repeating sound drills after their teachers. Also, if the sound drills or information learned are incorrect, they become fossil and hard to change or get rid in the future. They stuck in learners' mind and become as a habit.

This theory is still applicable in Libyan schools as teachers ask students to repeat after them to memorize the vocabulary and rules by heart. In teaching past simple, for example, a teacher asks the students to repeat after him the time indication "yesterday, last, and ago" and the forms of the verbs in the past simple found in the lesson several times till the students memorize these time adverbs and verbs by heart without understanding meaning or structure. The teacher here focuses on memorization and pronunciation regardless function or meaning. Learners become as parrots, as they repeat what they hear without understanding the reason of saying this or that. When it comes to use English, they add "ed" to irregular verbs, such as "go", "come", "see", and the like because they generalize the rule of "ed" with regular verbs.

2. Cognitivism Theory

As shown in the previous part, Chomsky believes that children are born with innate knowledge, which is called competence, that forms the deep structures of their first language. So, they acquire and learn other languages fast and effortlessly because the knowledge has been existed in their brain. All children have the universals of all languages, so they need just to find ways of how to practice and use language in communicative situations with native speakers, which is called performance.

In this theory of learning, language learning benefits from principles and ideas of language acquisition. So, teachers can resort to how children acquire their first language to use it in teaching a foreign language. Of course, language acquisition settings and conditions differ from language learning. Yet, teachers can benefit from the fundamentals of language acquisition to teach a foreign language. Children are not stressed or afraid of making mistakes in acquiring and using their first language. Also, in language acquisition, children find enough space and time to speak with their peers freely, and there is a critical period in language acquisition. A teacher might apply these principles in teaching a foreign language.

In fact, this theory of learning is rarely applicable in the Libyan settings. Learners are always under stress and fear of making mistakes. Thus, everything is performed by the teacher, who transfers the classroom into teacher-centered, not learner-centered. Also, teachers do not give space or time for learners to talk in the classroom. So, learners have no opportunities to practice language. A teacher may benefit from language acquisition principles in teaching through encouraging learners to talk without being punished physically or morally when they commit mistakes. For example, the teacher asks the students to talk about actions happened in the past for teaching past simple. The teacher passes by while the learners talk in groups and takes notes about the mistakes to be corrected collectively.

3. Constructivism Theory

This theory, in fact, functions as a model for the higher cognitive growth and explains the importance of integration a learner's cognitive activity in brain to a learner's experience in the real world. As learning starts from brain, where knowledge is stored previously, teachers seek to transfer this knowledge into utterances in reality to be used with other people in the community. This theory has a great effect on the field of second language learning as it confirms that knowledge is constructed and developed by learning through interacting with others in the real world. So, interaction with people in the real world is core and basic in learning. Hence, it is a must that a teacher studies the social and educational factors that form the learners' competence.

The application of theory in the Libyan setting is shown in the cognitive part as learning takes place through self-regulation that includes participatory and retroactive construction and adaptation on the learner's brain to respond to the activities in the real world. The mechanism is that a learner seeks to promote changes in his cognitive construction to adapt the surroundings in a flexible, nonlinear, open way. Yet, the social part is lacking as learners have no opportunities to practice language both inside and outside the classroom.

Teachers may benefit from this theory of learning in teaching and enhancing learners' knowledge and performance of language. As learners have knowledge in a form of innate competence in brain, teachers may ask them to search about things in the environment through asking members of the community. Learners, the other day, come to classroom and talk about findings, using English and grammar in the past. For example, a learner might say: Yesterday, I met an old man. I asked him about the education system in the 1960s. He told me that ...

4. Structuralism Theory

As we have seen previously, this theory was first influenced by Bloomfield's behaviorist theory, which identifies language structure with its kernel patterns and grammatical structures. Based on this theory, language is a system of structures that include elements starting from phonemes and ending with context. Hence, the language learning, based on Dai and Chen (2007), should be the task of "mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence" (p. 19).

In contrast to Chomsky, who focuses on competence as the hidden system that gives speech, Bloomfield focuses on performance as the system that describes utterances that deal objectively and systematically with observable data. Structuralism in this sense focuses on structure and how elements of a sentence are arranged and ordered rather than meaning. It emphasizes the description of language as a communication system.

This theory is commonly used in the Libyan settings in teaching grammar specifically. Learners, for example, are familiar with changing one form from affirmative into question or negative without paying attention to meaning. In teaching past simple, for instance, a teacher gives all structures of past simple, such as "Ali ate the apple", "Did Ali eat the apple", "What did Ali eat?", "Who ate the apple", "Ali ate the apple, didn't he?", "Ali didn't eat the apple", "The apple was eaten by Ali." The teacher, however, gives as many examples as possible and asks learners to change them in various structures. The teacher examines the learners in structures, such as change into question or negative, rather than meaning or function.

5. Functionalism Theory

This theory considers language and culture interrelated, and language is a semiotic meaning captured and constituted within a context in a specific culture. In this regard, Halliday (1975) indicates that “the social semiotic is the system of meanings that defines or constitutes the culture; and the linguistic system is one mode of realization of these meanings” (p. 139). Hence, language is learned and captured within a cultural context interpreted in terms of semiotic signs. It requires a learner then, based on Halliday (1975), to “construct the system of meanings that represents his own model of social reality. This process takes place inside his head; it is a cognitive process. But it takes place in contexts of social interaction, and there is no way it can take place except in these contexts” (p. 124).

Teachers, however, can benefit from this theory in using language as a way of communication through motivating learners to practice language in reality in order to learn. Teachers, for example, may ask learners to use language in various functions, such as asking questions, giving directions and orders, giving advice and facts, and many others. Hence, it is essential that a learner know these functions and decide which function be used in a specific situation. The role of teachers here is to describe the situation or the context in order that learners select the function required in that situation.

This theory of learning is fully lacked in the Libyan settings in teaching grammar. Libyan learners are not given the opportunity to think critically and create their own environments and situations. For them, language learning is a cognitive activity, not a process that represents a system of meaning or social semiotic developed gradually through social interactions in specific cultural contexts. Teachers may motivate learners to build the semiotic of their own society. In teaching past simple, for example, the teacher may motivate the learners to talk about an experience in the past. The teacher may ask, for instance, “What did you do yesterday?” or “Imagine you went to Tripoli last month, and you spent 10 days. Tell me about this trip.” Here, the teacher gives space and time for learners to practice language as it is their own.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the influence of theories of language learning on teaching foreign languages. The paper focuses on how the context and the social interaction assist English language learners in using English in communicative situations in reality with native English speakers. Based on theories by Watson and Skinner (behaviorism), Chomsky (cognitivism), Piaget and Vygotsky (constructivism), Bloomfield (structuralism), and Halliday (functionalism), the researcher digs deeply on the roots of theories of language learning and how they are manipulated in teaching English as a foreign language in Libya. The paper focuses on teaching grammar in Libyan school.

Based on the facts and information provided, it seems that functionalism serves well in the field of language use. As language is a social phenomenon used among people, learning language should be directed to language use rather language knowledge. The most commonly used theories of learning in the Libyan settings are behaviorism and structuralism. These two theories might work if the objective of teaching English is that learners know about English and pass English exams.

The paper concludes that we can never consider learning English successful unless learners use English in communicative situations with native speakers. In this regard, Gilles and Pierce (2003) state that

language cannot be separated from learning, because it is both essential to learning and enhanced by learning. Neither can language and learning be separated from interaction with others. Thus, as we examined how our students learned, we needed to consider the language (talk), the learning, the participants, and the context in which language is learned. (p. 61)

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