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Theories of Language Learning

Khawater Alshalan
Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University

I.　　INTRODUCTION

As a common knowledge, any new language teaching theory depends on linguistic theory. Up until recently, the linguistics theories have faced three important phases; traditional grammar, structuralism and functionalism. There is a connection between these three methods and they are responsible for the transformation of language teaching theories.

II.　　TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

Traditional grammar involves two major concepts; narrow and broad. A narrow concept clarifies that,in the end of the 18th century, traditional grammar was invented from ancient Greece and Rome and surprisingly became admired. It governed grammar and language teaching research for a vey long period in Europe. It focuses on the old language model while stressing on written language and abandoning the oral language. Mainly though, it tries very hard to cleanse and remain language. This is the reason behind calling ita prescriptive grammar. It was also called a school grammar because most schools adopted it.A broad concept means that traditional grammar focuses on the principal of historical comparative study of language as well as the contemporary language phenomena. All of which take the approach of descriptivism, which means demanding to describe the objective use of language and language change(Yin, 1990).In addition, Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics defined Traditional grammar as a grammar that relied on the past grammars of Latin or Greek and applied to other languages in an unsuitable way (Richards, 2000).

III.　　GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD

Language teaching was influenced by grammar translation method that was received from the traditional grammar theory (Gao, 2006).The grammar translation method has certain characteristics when teaching a foreign language. In foreign language teaching, one crucialpoint is to readresources, such as foreign classics, written in a foreign language. Obviously though, reading emphasizes the written language, not the oral. Since this method avoids using the oral language in teaching, learners fail to communicate with any native speaker using the target language. After years of studying and practicing the language, it is hard for the learners to speak up what they learnt (Gao, 2006).

Foreign language learning aims to translate the foreign language into the learners' first language as well as teaching grammar. Teachers use their native languages while teaching grammar points to make sure that their students would understand them clearly. For further explanations, teachers often use example sentences to clarify certain grammar rules. As for the learners, they need to carefully follow the given examples in order to create their own grammatically correct sentences. In class, foreign language teachers become the total authorities. Thus, the class is teacher-centered whereas learners absorb and take notes of everything the teacher says (Gao, 2006).

Nowadays, one must reevaluate the grammar translation method and judge certain points. First, the method overstressed the function in foreign language learning. Second, this method does not practice any language skill, only focuses on the knowledge of a language. Third, teaching a foreign language process is mechanical; do not depend on the practical use of the language in a real language environment. Forth, it highlights written, not spoken language. No one can ever deny that this method has great influence on people because grammar translation method achieved a lot to improve foreign language teaching. However, when scholars were able to recognize the flaws of the traditional grammar, they became gradually unsatisfied. They believed that it prevented the research of language from growing and expanding because it was the reason behind the negative effect of language and linguistic development (Xia, 2014). Therefore, these scholars started searching for new approached regarding language study. This is when the Structuralism approach came into existence.

IV. STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism emphasizes the ideathat language is a system thatexaminessounds, words and sentences within its system(Richards, 2000).The founder of structuralism was a Swiss linguist named Ferdinand de Saussure. He was respectively considered as the father of modern traditional linguist.Saussure stated the need of diachronic approaches used by previous linguists.He, then,presented the new synchronic approach in order to take linguists' attention by looking at the nature and composition of language as well as its constituent parts. Saussure strongly believes that a language contain internal and systematic rules (Yin, 1990).

Structuralism differs from the traditional grammar approach in many ways. While the traditional grammar gives priority to the written texts, structuralism focuses o the spoken language.Traditional grammar has a prescriptive point of view because it believes that pure language should be in agreement with grammar. Whereas Structuralism set the criteria by describing the language first; if its pure or not. Thus, it is descriptive (Xia, 2014). The traditional grammar approachcategorizes languages depending on their familiarity to Latin. The language of classics are admired and seen as perfect languages while all other languages are not as good. Structuralism, however, appreciatesevery language of every nation because it is a well-developed communication system.When describing a language, the traditional grammar approach was an absolute chaos. It studiedand mixed all languages together, not taking into account languages of different time (Xia, 2014). However, structuralism studies languages of the same period.Furthermore, the traditional grammar approach describes a language material subjectively; focuses on meaning instead of form.On the other hand, structuralism providesan objective explanation of any language (Gao, 2006).

When comparing both approaches, one would realize how structuralism has a huge advantage over the traditional grammar approach. These huge differences made scholars welcome structuralism with open arms by the end of the 19th century. Structuralism turned out to be widely known by the whole world in a very short period of time (Xia, 2014).

There were two schools of structuralism; European school and the American school.The role of Ferdinand de Saussure in the European school involves two major aspects. He was able to show abroad direction of modern linguistics by designing the tasks of linguistic research. Saussure noticed that understanding the meaning of words by their relations with other words was different from the positivist method that was common between leading academicians. Moreover, Saussure made numerousdivisions thatplaceda great foundation for later research, such as langue and parole, synchronically and diachronically.However, modern linguistics research is expected to get back to the traditional grammar approach because the relationships between those divisions were not clear enough (Xia, 2014).

Regarding the American School,Leonard Bloomfield (1933)was one of the respected linguists whoused to compare and contrast Germanic languages. Most American linguists believe that they are Bloomfield's followers and supporters. Their linguistic works revolves around answering questions raised by Bloomfield and adopting methods that are recommended by him (Riegel, 1973). Furthermore, Bloomfield created immediate constitute analysis (IC analysis) in order to break down a sentence into smaller parts. By embracing the IC analysis, it does not matter how along the sentence is because it can split into different smallest constitutes that can be examined separately. Thissupports the point that any language is considered a system of symbolic structures(Riegel, 1973).

At the beginning of the 20th century, one should understand what happened to the psychological research field.The Mentalism approach led by W. Wundt was in a total mess. For this reason psychologists decided to have a new theory to assist psychology to overcome this dilemmaAs a result, a psychological revolution startedwith J. B. Watson when he created behaviorism.This approach was able to replace Wundt's Mentalism. They claimed that gaining any knowledge should come from a direct experience (Cook, 2000).The only reliable knowledge is when it is acquired through an objective and visible experiment.Thus, feelings and impressionsare not reliant on. Bloomfield depended on the behaviorism theory to leadthestructuralism approach in studying language(Cook, 2000).

V. AUDIO-LINGUAL LANGUAGE TEACHING METHOD

Audio-lingual language teaching method differs from grammar translation method in a way that it looks at language as a human habit.Language is the speech spoken by speakers, not written. In this method, teachers are requirednot to teach the knowledge of the language but the language itself (Wen, 1999).There are some major characteristics of the Audio-lingual language teaching method.First, the method's most essential technique is drilling. Second, the process of the FL learning called habit formation. Learners need to imitate over and over again until they become ready to speak out a sentence naturally.Regarding written materials, learnersshould read a certain text repeatedly until they get familiar with it and could narrateit(Wen, 1999). Teachers could also use communicative activities in class and there should be repetitive drills and exercises. However, the teacher is responsible for forbidding learners to make mistakesbecause mistakes become habits. Learners would look up to their teachers and mimic their pronunciation. For this reason, teachers should use the

target language perfectly; native-sound pronunciation and intonation (Xia, 2014).

The purpose of the Audio-lingual language teaching method is to assist learners form the habit while trying to learn sentence patterns of a language (Wen, 1999). They would learn vocabulary after sentence structures while new vocabulary is introduced to them via dialogues. When teaching grammar, grammatical explanations are usually ignored (Xia, 2014). Teachers have a special technique where they ask another question immediately after learners answer the previous one. Thus, learners become able to answer questions automatically when they form its mechanism (Gao, 2006).

Foreign language study put language skills in a particular order, from most important to the least; listening, speaking, reading, then writing (Xia, 2014). Though, cultural teaching is removed when teaching a language. Even though this method admires the significance of having a little knowledge of the target language' culture, teaching culture is not combined with teaching the target language.However, teachers may only give a brief introduction on the culture before getting into the lesson (Gao, 2006).

VI.   CHOMSKY AND TRANSFORMATIONAL-GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

In the later half of the 20th century, Noam Chomskywasrecognized for making overwhelming achievements in linguistics, intellectual history, philosophy and international politics.Yet, his most well known role is in the field of linguistics. Chomsky designed a new theory for structuralism because the language structure classification regarding distribution and arrangement has many boundaries. Thus, heinvented a new theory called Transformational-generative grammar(TGG).It is "a system of rules that in some explicit and well-defined way assigns structural descriptions to sentences" (Hu, 2002, p. 724). Chomsky thinks that a child is capabletoadopt a kind of generative grammar that evidences his knowledge of his mother tongue.

Chomsky offered an innateness hypothesis because there were some crucial facts that were not analyzed sufficiently. The first fact is that children acquire language competence quickly without any effort. It is known that children speak their native language fluently when they reach five years old. Oneremarkable phenomenon is that acquiring the first language takes place entirely without an intentional teaching. According to the correctness of grammar, children can produce sentences he did not hear before.For this reason, Chomsky claimsthat all children are born with a language acquisition device (LAD) that helpsthem in language learning (Cook, 2000). However, Some scholars, such as Dell Hymes, have rejected this theory completely and came up with a new one.

Hymes's Communicative Competence

In 1972, Dell Hymes said that Chomsky's theory about language competence is not good enough to understandthe wonder of acquiring a language (Xia, 2014). Then, he created the theory of communicative competence where he argued that language competence involves four points.First, probability, to what degree communicative competence is in agreement with grammar rules.Second, practicability,to what degree a languageis required in communication. Third, accuracy is when speech is suitable. Forth, effectiveness, to what degree speech is made (Wen, 1999).

Throughout the 1980s, Canale & Swain said that communicative competence contains four main features of knowledge and skills.Alinguistic competence and a sociolinguistic competence is when speakers are able to speak appropriatelyaccording to the time, place and the person spoken to. Discourse competenceand Strategic competence is a speaker'sability to use different kinds of communication strategies depending on different discourse, such as avoidance or interpretation (Xu, 2002).

Functional-notional approach

The new functional-notional approach refers to language functions used in real-life.Learners needto be part of everyday language activities, such as giving directions or buying a ticket. They shouldunderstand the functions and differentiate between them depending on the situations they face. Teachers have to describe certainrealistic situations that a learner might be in to have them well prepared.For example, teaching the functions of language that are commonly used (Chen, 2000).

Systemic-functional linguistics

M. A. K. Halliday is the leading creator of systemic-functional linguistics that reputes language as foundational for experience building. His contributionsshape a new approach that is called systemic-functional linguistics (SFL). Halliday emphasizes on the fact that language and meaning are not separated.According to SFL, the source of language and communication is communicative function and semantics. SFL linguists believe that languagesare controlled and influenced by their social contexts (Halliday, 1985).

Communicative Approach of Language Teaching

In a communicative approach of language teaching, the focus is on the content rather than grammatical

points (Xu, 2002).For practice, learnersneed to use many different language structures, not one.They need to role-play in class and pretend to have a real communication that they are in a certain location, for example, and use language that is suitable. The teacher should never interrupt them until they finish their parts (Xia, 2014).

There are some disadvantages in the Communicative Approach of Language Teaching.Functions of language are not classified until now.Therefore, there would be difficulty in choosing the language functions to teach. It is also hard to decide how to arrange language functions in textbooks.Moreover, trying to focus on both language ability and communication competenceis challenging(Xu, 2002).

VII.   CONCLUSION

To conclude, linguistic theories facedtraditional grammar, structuralism and functionalism. Traditional grammar was applied to languages while the grammars were based on Greek and Latin. Since traditional grammar is about written texts, learners fail to communicate using the target language. Structuralism focuses on the spoken language and theAudio-lingual method looks at language as a human habit where learners repeat their teacher constantly. Regarding language learning, Chomsky claims that all children are born with LAD.The new functional-notional approach refers to language functions used in real-life. SFL linguists believe that languages are influenced by their social contexts. Furthermore, the communicative approach focuses on the content rather than grammatical points. However, the communicative approach has some disadvantages.

VIII.   REFERENCES

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