

Research on the Application of Linguistic Theories in Second Language Acquisition Within English Learning Contexts

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Abstract: In English classrooms of primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions in China, routine teaching is still largely conducted through text study and mechanical memorization. Authentic foreign language communication contexts are extremely scarce, which constitutes the core reason for the low English acquisition efficiency and weak practical application competence of Chinese learners. Most students have learned English for many years, yet the accumulated vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are mostly fragmented, failing to form a complete cognitive system for the second language. The solidified influence of native language thinking and the absence of daily language application scenarios both directly constrain the development of students' advanced language competence. The traditional cramming-based classroom model can hardly meet the requirements of the new curriculum standard for cultivating core English competencies. Second language acquisition (SLA) theory, as a core research area of cognitive linguistics, mainly comprises three key acquisition processes: language input, cognitive internalization and language output, which can provide solid theoretical support for English teaching reform in China. Against the research background of the non-immersive English teaching environment in China, this paper systematically sorts out the core connotations and pedagogical values of four major SLA theories, and summarizes the adaptive advantages and practical obstacles of the localized application of the theories based on the actual teaching status of front-line classrooms. From multiple perspectives including classroom model innovation, communication context construction, teaching system optimization and upgrading of students' learning strategies, this paper proposes practical improvement approaches adapted to local learning conditions. Based on the actual pain points of English teaching in China, this study promotes the implementation of SLA theory in classroom teaching and fills the gap in the connection between linguistic theory and teaching practice. The research findings can further improve the localized English teaching system, effectively enhance learners' SLA quality and cross-cultural communication competence, and boast sufficient academic reference value and classroom guiding significance.

Keywords: English Acquisition; Theory of Second Language Acquisition; Classroom Teaching; Language Transfer; Context-based Teaching.

1. Introduction

The reform of foreign language teaching at all levels in China has been continuously advancing. The teaching positioning and talent cultivation direction of the English subject have already undergone a complete transformation. The simplistic exam-oriented teaching model that solely relies on mechanical memorization and grammar recitation has gradually withdrawn from mainstream classrooms. The core task of current English teaching focuses on the all-round cultivation of students' comprehensive language application ability, cross-cultural cognitive literacy, and practical communication skills. The research on second language acquisition focuses on the acquisition rules of foreign languages, cognitive evolution mechanisms, and various acquisition influencing factors. The mature and complete theoretical system can clearly dissect the internal operational logic of second language learning and provide scientific guidance for classroom teaching reform and the optimization of students' autonomous learning. The acquisition of the native language is a natural and life-oriented immersive process [1]. Domestic classroom English learning is completely different from this model. Periodic teaching, non-immersive language environment, and artificial teaching intervention are the basic characteristics of local English teaching. Fixed native language thinking, scarce high-quality foreign language materials, insufficient practical practice

scenarios, and weak context perception ability are all key factors affecting students' final acquisition effect.

There are two obvious shortcomings in local English teaching. One is that it focuses on the teaching of theoretical knowledge while neglecting the shaping of students' comprehensive abilities. The other is that it emphasizes the accumulation of knowledge within the classroom while lacking practical application training outside the classroom. Many students have the common problem of "knowing the knowledge but not being able to use or speak", with typical Chinese English expressions, chaotic language logic, and poor communication skills, which is the common situation of domestic English learners. Standardized and theoretical knowledge in textbooks is difficult to be transformed into practical language skills that students can flexibly adapt to different scenarios. Many current classroom teaching designs do not make dynamic adjustments according to students' different cognitive characteristics, and the teaching content, teaching pace, and students' acquisition patterns do not match. This is a common phenomenon in English classrooms at all levels. The research focus in the field of foreign language teaching has always centered around several core issues. How to use second language acquisition theory to break the rigid model of traditional teaching? How to fill the gap in students' English application ability? How to create a modern English teaching system that is adapted to local learning conditions? These questions are also the core entry points of this research.

2. The Core Theoretical Content and Applicable Logic of Second Language Acquisition

2.1. The Core Essence of The Hypothesis and Its Contextual Adaptability

The entire theoretical system can meet the ability cultivation needs of second language learning at different stages and in different application scenarios. The four core theories - the input hypothesis, the output hypothesis, the intermediate language theory, and the language transfer theory - are highly compatible with domestic classroom teaching models and students' autonomous learning characteristics, and can precisely solve various common problems in native English acquisition. Deepening the classroom implementation and practical application of these four theories can effectively enhance the scientificity and standardization of domestic English teaching [2].

The input hypothesis is the foundational theory of the entire second language acquisition research system. Comprehensible language input is a prerequisite for the smooth development of second language acquisition. The steady improvement of students' language proficiency cannot be achieved without the support of graded and high-quality adaptable foreign language materials. The commonly used "i+1" criterion in the academic community is the core academic standard for judging the effectiveness of language input. "i" represents the language knowledge reserves and cognitive levels that students have mastered at present, while "1" represents the new language content and expression logic that are adapted to the improvement of students' abilities. High-quality and valuable materials with acquisition value generally possess three characteristics: complete semantics, coherent logic, and real communication scenarios. Simply fragmenting and mechanically stacking isolated knowledge points does not meet the basic requirements of scientific language input.

There are obvious shortcomings in the language input system of domestic English classrooms. Textbooks and accompanying teaching aids are the main or even the only channels for students to obtain English materials. The single type of materials, serious homogeneity of content, and lack of graded design in difficulty are the prominent problems of the current input mode. Materials with too low difficulty cannot promote students' ability advancement, while materials with excessive difficulty are beyond students' cognitive range and are difficult to be effectively absorbed and utilized [3]. Ineffective language input is very common in daily teaching. The non-immersive teaching environment in the classroom cannot reproduce the real English communication scenarios. Students' long-term passive reception of static text content makes it difficult for them to master the flexible usage and communication logic of language in different scenarios. Reconstructing a scientific classroom language material system and innovating traditional language input modes are the key paths to solving the low efficiency of native English acquisition.

2.2. The Practical Guiding Value of the Output Hypothesis

The input hypothesis focuses on theoretical analysis of second language acquisition but lacks practical teaching guidance, resulting in limited applicability. The output

hypothesis effectively addresses this shortcoming by highlighting the crucial role of language production in second language learning. Pure language input enables students only to memorize linguistic knowledge superficially, whereas internalization and flexible application of knowledge require output practice. Spoken communication, written composition, and text translation are the primary forms of output in English learning. Language output helps students identify knowledge gaps, test grammatical rules, and correct expression errors [4], thereby enabling them to gradually refine their linguistic logic and establish a standardized system of second language expression. Currently, a structural teaching issue—imbalance between input and output—is widely present in domestic English classrooms. Most class time is spent on theoretical teaching such as knowledge decomposition, grammar analysis, and text interpretation. Practical training such as oral interaction, impromptu expression, and creative writing, which are highly practical, receive a severely insufficient proportion of class time. The lack of regular practical scenarios greatly limits the development of students' language application ability. Many students have a solid grasp of theoretical knowledge, but they are at a loss when facing practical tasks such as daily communication and written creation, and it is difficult for their book knowledge to be transformed into actual language skills. Optimizing the classroom teaching structure, adjusting the input-output ratio, and strengthening the classroom practical, are the core practical guidance provided by the output hypothesis for local English teaching.

2.3. Interlanguage Theory and the Optimization Logic of Acquisition Errors

The intermediate language theory has refreshed the traditional academic understanding of second language acquisition errors. The language system constructed by second language learners is independent and belongs to a typical transitional language system. This system is different from the learner's native language system and does not meet the standardized requirements of the target language. Dynamic iteration, system evolution, and penetrable correction are the core academic attributes of intermediate language. The complete process of second language acquisition is the evolution process of intermediate language continuously correcting, improving, and gradually approaching the standardized English system. Grammatical deviations, sentence usage errors, and expression omissions that occur during the learning process are all normal phenomena in the development stage of intermediate language and cannot be simply defined as students' ability deficiencies.

The error correction mode in traditional English classrooms has obvious drawbacks. Mechanical error correction, total negation, and unified criticism were the mainstream methods of teaching in the past. These fixed patterns completely ignored the objective laws of the dynamic development of intermediate language. As a result, students would experience acquisition anxiety, their enthusiasm for active expression would significantly decrease, and their learning confidence would also be undermined. The intermediate language theory provides a new idea for classroom error correction. Layered, precise, and humanized error correction mechanisms are more in line with students' acquisition patterns. Teaching work needs to respect students' phased acquisition deficiencies, tolerate the dynamic

development errors of intermediate language, and gradually promote the standardization construction of students' language system.

2.4. The Localized Application Value of the Language Transfer Theory

The theory of language transfer mainly studies the intervention effects of the native language system and thinking patterns on the acquisition of a second language. It classifies the transfer effects into positive transfer and negative transfer [5]. The commonalities in sentence structure and expression logic between the native language and English can produce a positive reinforcing effect. Students can quickly master the basic rules of the second language based on their native language foundation, effectively reducing the difficulty of learning at the initial stage. The differences in thinking patterns, sentence structures, and communication habits between Chinese and English languages, which belong to different language families, will trigger obvious negative transfer effects. Common problems such as Chinese expressions, grammar confusion, and sentence structure errors in daily learning are all caused by the continuous interference of negative transfer from the native language.

Negative transfer of the native language is the main obstacle for the advancement of English for native students. The long-term Chinese language environment has led students to form a fixed thinking pattern of using Chinese in communication. Problems of Chinese English in oral communication and written writing have a wide coverage and are highly stubborn, and ordinary knowledge point explanations are difficult to completely solve the problem. Teaching research needs to clarify the internal mechanism of the interference of the native language and distinguish the different roles of positive and negative transfer. Teaching practice should actively avoid the negative impact of negative transfer and fully utilize the auxiliary role of positive transfer to improve the standardization and accuracy of students' English expression as a whole. This is the core goal of the localization and implementation of the theory of language transfer in China.

3. The Practical Challenges of Second Language Acquisition Theories in The Application of English Learning

The theories of second language acquisition have been widely applied in domestic English teaching research and in the practice of classrooms. However, during the process of localizing and implementing these theories, many problems still exist. The disconnection between theory and practice, the fragmentation of application models, and the insufficient adaptability to different scenarios are the three core challenges at present. The educational value and academic advantages of the theories cannot be fully exerted, the inherent drawbacks of traditional teaching cannot be completely eliminated, and it is difficult to achieve a breakthrough in the quality of local English teaching and the efficiency of students' language acquisition [6].

The understanding of second language acquisition theories by primary school teachers is mostly at a superficial level, lacking systematic and holistic application thinking. Most teachers only have a basic understanding of the theoretical content and lack in-depth study of the core essence, applicable boundaries, and implementation paths of the theories.

Mechanically applying and using theories in a one-sided manner is the norm in classroom teaching. Teaching design is difficult to adapt to the cognitive differences, acquisition stages, and individualized learning needs of different students. Blindly increasing the quantity of input materials will only result in a large amount of ineffective acquisition behaviors [7]. Simply strengthening output training without quality input support will lead to students' language expression being empty and frequent occurrence of various errors. Fragmented application of theories separates the internal connections between input, output, error correction, and thinking cultivation, making it difficult to form a complete and scientific acquisition loop.

The language input system for native English teaching has multiple shortcomings. The sources of materials are limited, the content is highly homogeneous, and the adaptability to scenarios is weak.

Students cannot establish an independent English thinking system. They often rely on the logic of their mother tongue to organize English content, resulting in recurring problems of Chinglish and difficulty in completely solving them. The classroom correction mode does not conform to the dynamic development law of intermediate language, lacking scientificity and inclusiveness. Completely denying students' temporary expression errors will directly dampen their enthusiasm for expression and learning confidence [8]. Ignoring the persistent and stubborn systematic errors that repeatedly occur will cause language deficiencies to continue to solidify, seriously hindering the standardized development of students' intermediate language system.

4. Optimal Application Strategies of Second Language Acquisition Theory in English Learning

The implementation of the theory of native language teaching requires it to be in line with the basic characteristics of domestic teaching and strictly follow the scientific laws of second language acquisition. In teaching practice, we should actively abandon the fragmented and formalized application mistakes of theories, and improve the teaching system from multiple dimensions. Optimize the quality of language input, establish a hierarchical output training system, establish a scientific error correction mechanism, create a scenario-based teaching model, and improve the student's autonomous learning path. All these efforts will comprehensively promote the deep integration of second language acquisition theory and classroom teaching [9].

Primary teachers need to proactively update their teaching concepts, establish a complete theoretical cognitive framework for second language learning, and abandon fragmented and mechanical application methods of theories. By integrating teaching objectives at different grade levels, students' cognitive characteristics, and the laws of acquisition and development, they should promote a multi-theory collaborative education model. They should use the input hypothesis to complete the selection of graded materials and the design of classroom teaching, utilize the output hypothesis to create gradient practice tasks, and apply the intermediary language theory and language transfer theory to conduct precise correction and thinking guidance. The focus of teaching needs to be dynamically adjusted according to the students' acquisition stage. In the basic stage, high-quality comprehensible input is the core, to consolidate students'

language foundation. In the improvement stage, emphasis is placed on practical output and error correction, to hone students' language application skills, and to comprehensively enhance the accuracy and classroom effectiveness of theoretical application [10].

The upgrade of the classroom language material system must strictly follow the "i+1" advancement principle, and comprehensively improve the quality of input content and the adaptability to scenarios. Teaching materials break through the limitations of textbooks and integrate diverse resources such as simple English reading materials, life-oriented communication language materials, short news articles, and English short videos. Based on students' interest characteristics and cognitive levels, the input content is stratified and set up, and the difficulty gradient of the language materials is precisely controlled. Classroom teaching actively builds immersive communication scenarios, through activities such as role-playing, situational conversations, topic discussions, and cross-cultural sharing, to enrich the forms of classroom interaction. Guide students to intuitively perceive the differences in scenarios of vocabulary combinations, sentence usage, and communication logic, and achieve the scene-based internalization and flexible application of language knowledge.

Reorganize the input-output ratio in the classroom, and establish a complete acquisition loop of "input internalization - practical output - reflection and correction". The classroom output tasks adopt a hierarchical design model, adapting to the acquisition needs of students at different levels. The basic level sets up basic exercises such as sentence pattern imitation, sentence pattern transformation, and simple situational dialogues to consolidate students' core language knowledge. The improvement level designs comprehensive tasks such as theme writing, classroom speeches, group debates, and impromptu expressions to exercise students' higher-order language abilities. The teaching activities balance oral and written output, and regularly carry out diversified practical training. The teaching feedback focuses on students' thinking deviations, logical flaws, and context adaptation issues, guiding students to independently reflect and actively correct errors, and continuously improving their personal language system.

The teaching process establishes a systematic intervention mechanism for native language transfer, and adds a module for comparing Chinese and English languages. It systematically examines the core differences between the two languages in terms of sentence structure, expression patterns, and logical thinking. It anticipates various acquisition problems caused by negative transfer in advance and implements pre-emptive and precise intervention. In the classroom correction, the principle of inclusiveness and stratification is followed. Temporary and phased errors are strictly distinguished from stubborn and systemic errors. The objective laws of the dynamic development of the intermediate language are fully respected, and students' enthusiasm for language expression is protected. For frequent and stubborn errors, special training, focused review, and targeted guidance are carried out to steadily push students' intermediate language system closer to the standardized target language.

Guide students to reconstruct the autonomous learning model based on the theory of second language acquisition, and comprehensively improve their individual learning

quality. Select learning materials that are suitable for their cognitive levels according to the "i+1" principle, abandon inefficient learning methods such as mechanical practice and rote memorization, and focus on the in-depth understanding and internalization of high-quality language materials. Encourage students to regularly carry out output exercises such as English writing, oral imitation, and situational dialogues, and continuously strengthen their ability to apply language flexibly [11]. Actively sort out various language errors in daily learning, categorize and summarize the causes of problems, and actively avoid the interference caused by negative transfer of the mother tongue. Build a scientific, autonomous, and efficient second language learning model, and steadily improve students' comprehensive language proficiency and cross-cultural communication ability.

5. Conclusion

The theories of second language acquisition clearly explain the cognitive essence, development patterns and core influencing factors of second language learning. They can provide solid scientific basis for the reform of local English teaching and the optimization of students' autonomous learning, effectively improving various problems such as low efficiency of traditional teaching input, insufficient output, prominent interference from the native language, and low quality of acquisition. The four core theories cover four core dimensions: input of language materials, practical output, error evolution, and transfer of thinking. They are fully adapted to the non-immersive English teaching ecosystem in China. At present, there are still many shortcomings in the application of local teaching theories. Problems such as theoretical cognition, insufficient quality of input materials, imbalance between input and output, and non-standard error correction mechanisms are widespread. The educational value and practical advantages of the theories have not been fully exerted.

The high-quality development of local English teaching lies in promoting the deep integration of second language acquisition theories and classroom practice. Relying on systematic theoretical thinking to optimize the entire teaching process, upgrading the comprehensible language input system, building an immersive communication context, conducting gradient output training, scientifically intervening in negative transfer of the native language, and improving the student's autonomous learning system. A series of optimization measures can completely break through the inherent limitations of traditional indoctrination-style teaching, helping students break away from the inefficient learning mode of mechanical memorization and build independent and standardized English thinking. Students' language comprehension ability, logical expression ability, and cross-cultural communication ability can be comprehensively improved, providing solid support for the optimization and upgrading of the local English teaching system.

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