

Master 1 Semester 2 Didactics of Foreign Languages

Lesson Five: Principles of Language Teaching / Learning

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1. Introduction

Teachers' choices about how to teach are grounded in established principles of language learning and teaching. Internalizing connections between these principles will determine why we choose to use a particular classroom technique.

2. Cognitive Principles

2.1. Definition

Cognitive principles relate to mental and intellectual functions.

2.2. Categories of Cognitive Principles

2.2.1. Automaticity

The principle of automaticity includes subconscious absorption of language through meaningful use and a focus on the purpose to which language is put and not the form. This principle means that a large proportion of the lessons should be focused on the "use" of language for purposes that are as genuine as a classroom context will allow and that students will gain more language competence in the long run if the functional purposes of language are the focal point. Automaticity is achieved when students slowly achieve fluency.

2.2.2. Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning requires associating the elements of a language for the realisation of a real purpose in life. Mixing the new information within existing structures and memory systems results in links creating stronger retention. Meaningful learning leads to better long-term retention than rote learning.

In terms of classroom techniques, the principle of meaningful learning implies focusing on:

- the students' interest and academic goals ,
- and the students' existing knowledge and background so that it becomes associated with something they already know.

2.2.3. The Anticipation of Reward

Skinner and others have demonstrated the strength of rewards in both animal and human behaviour. According to Skinner, the anticipation of reward is the most powerful factor in directing one's behaviour toward a purpose. The implications of the anticipation reward for the classroom are twofold:

1.The teacher can perceive the importance of immediate rewards such as praise for correct responses ("Very good!") and appropriate scores to indicate success.

2. The teacher can help the students to see clearly why they are doing something and its relevance to their goals in learning. However, a reward-driven conditioning theory of learning may lead learners to become dependent on short-term rewards in the sense that they make

them develop a habit of looking to teachers for rewards, which may restrict the development of their intrinsic system of rewards.

2.2.4. Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic Motivation is related to the idea that the learner's behaviour stems from his needs. It is important to consider the intrinsic motives of the students before designing classroom tasks which have a greater chance for success if they are self-rewarding in the perception of the learner. The learners will eagerly perform a task if it is fun, interesting useful, or challenging.

2.2.5. Strategic Investment

In the light of many studies of successful and unsuccessful learners, language teachers are focusing more on the role of the learner in the process of learning.

Strategic investment is related to the "methods" that the learner uses to internalize and to perform in the language. Successful mastery of a language is due to a large extent to a learner's own personal "investment" of time, effort, and attention to the language in the form of a battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the teacher should:

- recognize and deal with the wide variety of strategies that the learners successfully bring to the learning process,
- pay attention to each learner because learning strategies signal numerous learner preferences that a teacher needs to attend to; for example, visual versus auditory preferences and individual vs group work preferences.

3. Affective Principles

3.1. Definition

Affective principles relate to emotional involvement: feelings about the self, relationships in a community of learners and emotional ties between language and culture.

3.2 Categories of Affective Principles

3.2.1 Language Ego

The language ego is related to the idea that while we learn a language, we develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and – a second identity. The new language ego can easily create within the learner a sense of defensiveness and inhibitions. In this sense, we have to be careful when dealing with learners who feel "humiliated" in front of the lack of words or structure needed to communicate.

To provide affective support, the teacher should:

- display a supportive attitude to the students,
- choose techniques which are cognitively challenging but not overwhelming at an affective level,
- and consider learners' language ego states in order to help determine:
 - who to call on,
 - when to correct a student's error,
 - and how much to explain something

3.2.2 Self-confidence

This is related to the "I can do it" or the self-esteem principle. At the heart of all learning is one's belief in one's ability to accomplish the task. Self-confidence is related to the learners' belief that they are capable of accomplishing a task; this is an important factor in their success in attaining the task. In terms of classroom applications and in order to make the learners develop a sense of accomplishment needed to learn, the teacher should: give ample verbal and non-verbal assurance to the students; it helps a student to hear / see a teacher show a belief in the student's ability; and sequence techniques from easier to more difficult; this will help in sustaining self-confidence where it already exists and build it where it does.

3.2.3 Risk-taking

If the previous two principles are satisfied, they lay the foundations for risk taking in the sense that: if learners recognize their own language ego, and develop the belief that, "yes, they can do it", they are ready to take the necessary risks for using the new language. This principle is at the heart of educational philosophy: many teaching contexts encourage correctness and right answers, while most educational research has shown that risk-taking, especially making mistakes, is more conducive to long-term retention and intrinsic motivation.

In terms of classroom implications, the teacher should:

- create an environment in the classroom that encourages students to try out language, to venture a response,
- provide reasonable challenges in the tasks, which should be neither too easy nor too difficult,
- respond to students' risky attempts with a positive reaction, praising them for trying while at the same time attending to their language.

3.2.4 The Language-Culture Connection

Language and culture are intricately intertwined. Anytime we successfully learn a language, we will also learn something of the culture of the speakers of that language. Whenever we teach a language, we also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

In terms of classroom applications, the teacher should:

- discuss cross-cultural differences with the students, emphasizing that no culture is "better" than another one and that cross-cultural understanding is an important facet of learning a language;

- include certain activities and materials that illustrate the connection between language and culture;
- teach the cultural connotations implied through the language.

4. Linguistic Principles

4.1 Definition

Linguistic principles centre on language itself and on how learners deal with the linguistic systems which make it: phonology, grammar, semantics...

4.2 Categories of Linguistic Principles

4.2.1 The Native Language Effect

The learners' native language is a significant factor in the acquisition of a new language. Most of the time, we think of the native language as exercising an interfering effect on the target language, and indeed the most salient effect does appear to be one of interference. The majority of a learner's errors in producing the second / foreign language, especially at the beginning level, stem from the learner's assumption that the target language operates like the native language.

In terms of classroom suggestions, the teacher should:

- regard learners' errors as important "windows" to their underlying system and provide appropriate feedback on them by explaining the cause of the error;
- help the students to understand that not everything from the native language system will cause error;
- and make the students think in the target language instead of resorting to translation.

4.2.2 Interlanguage

The Interlanguage Principle implies that foreign language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi-systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language.

In terms of classroom implications, the teacher should:

- distinguish between systematic interlanguage errors, stemming from the native language or the target language and other errors, usually that the student can easily become aware of;
- explain that most mistakes are indicators that aspects of the new language that are still developing.
- get students to self-correct selected errors: the ability to self-correct may indicate readiness to use that form correctly.

4.3. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence (CC) is the most important linguistic principle of learning and teaching.

It consists of a combination of:

- organizational competence : grammatical and discourse) ,
- pragmatic competence : functional and sociolinguistic) ,
- strategic competence : learning strategies ,
- and psychomotor skills : pronunciation , stress and intonation.

In terms of classroom implications, the teacher should: give grammar some attention, but not neglect the other important components of CC, use language that students will encounter outside the classroom, and prepare the students to be independent learners and manipulators of authentic language.

5. Conclusion

Cognitive, affective and linguistic principles constitute the foundations for language teaching. They act as major theoretical insights on which the teacher's techniques can be based.

Lesson six: Group Work Activities

1. Introduction
 2. Advantages of Group work
 3. Implementing Group work in the Classroom
 4. Conclusion
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1. Introduction

Group work is a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two (pair work) or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self initiated language. Groups larger than four defeat one of the major purposes for doing work: giving students more opportunities to speak.

2. Advantages of Group work

2.1. Interactive language

Group work helps to solve the problem of classes that are too large to offer enough opportunities to speak. It provides opportunities for:

- student face-to-face give and take
- practice in negotiation of meaning
- extended conversational exchanges
- student adoption of roles

2.2. Affective Climate

Group work provides:

- reticent students' vocal participation in the task ,
- cooperation with each other in pursuit of common goals ,
- and an increase in student motivation .

2.3. Learner Responsibility and Autonomy

Group work places responsibility for action and progress upon each of the members of the group. It is difficult to "hide" in a small group, which can easily happen even in a relatively small class of twenty students.

3. Implementing Group work in the Classroom

Group work can go wrong if it is not carefully planned, well monitored, and followed up in some way.

3.1. Selecting Appropriate Group work Techniques

Pair work is more appropriate than group work for tasks that are

- short
- linguistically simple

- quite controlled in terms of the structure of the task

Appropriate pair activities include:

- practising dialogues with a partner ,
- performing meaningful substitution “drills” ,
- peer correction : checking written work with each other ,
- preparation for merging with a larger group ,

Group work tasks are :

- Role-plays: they involve giving a role to one or more members of a group and assigning an objective that participants must accomplish.
- Simulations: they involve working through an imaginary situation as a social unit, the objective of which is to solve some specific problem.
- Drama: it is a more formal form of role-play or simulation, with a pre-planned story line and script.
- Projects: an outside activity to be reported on in class.
- Interview: The goal of an interview could be at lower levels , limited to using requesting functions , learning vocabulary for expressing personal data , producing questions ; and at higher levels , requiring more complex facts , opinions , ideas , and feelings .
- Brainstorming : a technique whose purpose is to initiate some sort of thinking process , often used in preparing students to read a text , to discuss a complex issue , or to write on a topic . It involves students in a “rapid-fire”, free-association listing of concepts, or ideas, or facts, or feelings relevant to some topic.
- Information gap activities: they include activities in which the objective is to request information with primary attention to information and not to language forms, and the necessity of communicative interaction in order to reach the objective.

3.2. Planning, Monitoring and Debriefing Tasks

The planning phase should include:

- Introducing the technique : a brief explanation , a statement of the ultimate purpose
- Modelling the technique: give a model of what the students are supposed to do
- Giving explicit detailed instructions: specific instructions on what they are to do

Monitoring involves the teacher in the task of a facilitator of learning, a guide. Debriefing means reporting on the task development in the group work: the whole class listens to the different reports of the groups .Each subgroup has a chance to perceive differences and similarities in their work. This establishes affective support in the sense that individual students get reassurance from the interaction developed in the class.

4. Conclusion

It is necessary for a teacher to organise group work in the class until it becomes part of routine. This activity will help develop linguistic interaction among students, a vital element in the learning process.

Lesson Seven: Designing Classroom Techniques and Technology

1. Introduction

Teaching is derived from a set of principles that form the skeleton of an overall approach to language learning and teaching. The choices that the teacher makes about what to do in the classroom are enlightened by the objectives of the course, the techniques, the textbooks and technology available.

2. Techniques Redefined

The term technique is virtually synonymous with procedure, practice, exercise, strategy, activity and task.

Even before Anthony (1963) defined the term technique, the language-teaching literature widely accepted the term technique as a superordinate term to refer to various activities that either teachers or learners perform in the classroom. In other words, techniques include any activity referring to the pedagogical components of a classroom session.

Activities include role-plays, drills, games, peer-editing, small-group activity and information-gap exercises.

A task focuses on the authentic use of language for meaningful communicative purposes beyond the language classroom.

3. Categories of Techniques

3.1 Mechanical , Meaningful Drills

A drill is defined as a technique that focuses on a minimal number of language forms (grammatical or phonological structures) through some type of repetition or substitution exercise. Drills are done chorally (the whole class repeating together) or individually.

- Mechanical drills have only one correct response.

- Meaningful drills have a limited set of possible responses.

3.2 Controlled to Free Techniques

Techniques range from the most controlled (manipulation) to free techniques (communication). At one extreme end of the continuum, a technique is totally controlled by the teacher, requiring a predicted response from the student(s), for example choral repetition, substitution drills, dictation and reading aloud. At the other end of the continuum, the communicative extreme, students' responses are open-ended and therefore unpredictable and teachers have a less controlled role, as students are free to be creative with their responses. The extent of the teacher's control over the learning activity can be classified as follows.

Controlled Techniques	Free Techniques
Teacher-centred	Student-centred
Manipulative	Communicative
Structured	Open-ended
Predicted student responses	Unpredicted responses
Pre-planned objectives	Negotiated objectives
Set curriculum	Cooperative curriculum

4. Textbooks and Other Written Texts

The most common form of material support for language instruction comes through textbooks. Texts, spoken or written, are of different types or genres of linguistic forms.

Among written texts, the range of possibilities extends from short texts like labels, forms, charts, schedules, advertisements, menus, posters, to essays, manuals and books; textbooks are one type of a book for use in an educational institution.

5. Technology in the Language Classroom

Technology first entered the language classroom in the late 1950s in the form of the language laboratory. When the personal computer (PC) came on the scene in the 1980s, the language-teaching profession could offer linguistic input and output, feedback, student collaboration, interactivity, and fun.

6. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The recent advances in educational applications of computer hardware and software have provided a resource for language classrooms.

The benefits of including a computer component in language instruction are:

- practice with feedback,
- individualization in a large classroom,
- the fun factor,
- variety in the resources available and learning styles used,
- exploratory learning with large amounts of language data.

E-mail is the most obvious way of using a computer for English teaching: giving students the possibility for actual communication with individuals around the world. E-mail “pen pals” have become popular. Through the web, certain chat programs offer students real-time communication.

7. Conclusion

Whatever the technique used, it has to be in conformity with the approach believed in and the teaching situation.

Lesson 8: Planning the Language Lesson

1. Introduction

Efficient teaching relies to a large extent on careful planning of lessons. (Al Mutawa & Kailani, 1989). A good lesson plan brings satisfaction to the teacher as well as motivation and interest for the learners. This makes the teaching/learning situation more enjoyable.

The lesson plan should be thoughtfully established according to certain principles, so that each lesson will contain the necessary ingredients for developing the language skills of the students. The lesson plan is a brief outline, usually on a small card, which the teacher has to prepare before he/she comes to the classroom in order to be used as a guide during the presentation of the lesson. The teaching card (plan) is not only used to outline the different steps of lesson presentation but also, to note different comments about the lesson after it has been presented.

2. General principles about lesson planning

- The teacher is not obliged to follow blindly the textbook. The latter represents a source of language materials which can be used in different ways. The teacher is supposed to know the content of the textbook, but then, should be able to select what to keep, what to add, and what to omit according to the teaching situation in which he/she is.
- Each lesson should have clearly defined objectives. A lesson is not a random selection of items to be learned haphazardly during a specific period of time. Rather, it is a progression of interrelated activities which reinforce each other in establishing and consolidating the learning toward which both teacher and students are directing their efforts.
- A lesson should progress in a smooth, smart way so that the teacher will lead learners to move from one activity to another in a coherent way with little or no wasted time.
- The activities used in the same lesson should not all be of the same type. The teacher should make an effort to vary the activities to be dealt with in the lesson. Sticking to the same activities may lead to boredom and fatigue on the part of the learners even if they seem to enjoy them at first.
- The teacher should plan to do in class what cannot be done out of class (Rivers, 1981). This means that the classroom time should be devoted to activities which require the teacher assistance. Out of class activities should be used to reinforce and consolidate the learning which has taken place inside the classroom.
- The lesson plan should not always be done in the same pattern. It should, however, leave the students in a constant state of suspense wondering what would be the next step. Monotonous lesson plans lead the students to expect how the teacher is proceeding.

- The teacher is not supposed to follow the lesson plan word by word. The situation inside the classroom may prompt the teacher to take quick decisions, to modify the plan when necessary.

3. Basic elements in Lesson Planning

According to Al Mutawa & Kailani (1989), the written lesson plan includes the following guidelines:

1. The day and date of presentation should be indicated in the margin. Lesson (or number of the step) and page are at the top of the preparation. The teaching point should also be stated briefly.
2. The objectives of the lesson should be stated clearly so that all the activities will be geared towards that objective.
3. The language points to be taught and materials to be used are made clear.
4. A brief statement of what the teacher is to do in the first five minutes of the lesson, whether he will check homework, revise previous material – words, functions or structural items, do some remedial work, give a quiz, do a spelling drill, etc.
5. The teacher is advised to refer to the teacher's book for standard teaching procedures that are to be used along with the procedures indicated for each step or lesson.
6. Pair or group work activities are to be referred to, and so are workbook exercises and cassette recorder drills.
7. Communicative activities, reading and writing skills or any other application exercises are also to be referred to. Allocated times for this section is between ten to fifteen minutes.
8. The last five minutes can be devoted to evaluation and assigning homework. The teacher can also ask the class to do a light activity such as a song, a general talk or even tell a joke, so that the pupils may leave the classroom in a good mood. The teacher need not write this down in the lesson plan, unless there is a predetermined homework assignment.

Lesson Nine: Strategies-based Instruction

1. Introduction

Learning involves a certain degree of “investment” of one’s time, and effort. It requires a combination of observing, focusing, practising, monitoring, correcting, redirecting information, and a whole battery of strategies. Nowadays, where the focus is on communicative, interactive, learner-centred teaching, Strategies-based instruction (SBI) is the latest development of theoretical and empirical studies.

2. Definition of a Strategy

Strategies are:

- specific methods of approaching a task ,
- modes of operation for controlling and manipulating a certain information .

We may use a variety of strategies for understanding what someone has just said, for example, the strategies of:

- replay of the conversation,
- key word identification,
- attention to non-verbal cues,
- attention to context,
- grammatical analysis,
- requests for repetition,
- rephrasing,
- word definition,
- or turning to someone else for interpretation.

Oxford, Rebecca (1990) in “Language Learning Strategies : What Every Teacher should Know” New York:Newbury House ; divides strategies into :

- cognitive strategies applied to language and used to remember more effectively and compensate for missing knowledge ;
- and metacognitive strategies applied to the learning process and used to organize and evaluate learning, manage emotions, and learn with others.

3. Foundations of Strategies-based Instruction

Research in this area, SBI, identified successful language learners and extracted – through tests, interviews and other data analysis – relevant factors believed to contribute to their success.

Good language learners have been found to present the following characteristics:

- find their own way, taking charge of their learning: are independent;
- organize information about language: synthesise information;
- are creative, developing a “feel” for the language by experimenting with its grammar and vocabulary;
- make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom;
- use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned;
- use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning the foreign language;
- use contextual cues to help them in comprehension;
- learn to make intelligent guesses;
- learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

4. Models of Strategies-based Instruction

There are three major models of incorporating strategy awareness.

- Textbook-embedded instruction with guidelines and exercises for strategy awareness and practice.
- Self-help guides with assignments of a self-help study.
- Learning centres where learners are provided with a number of possible types of extra-class assistance in writing, reading, academic study skills, pronunciation, and other oral production, depending on the learners’ needs and abilities.

5. Conclusion

Language teachers should get students strategically invested in their language learning process. One of the best ways of getting students involved in their language learning is to offer them the opportunity to develop their own set of strategies for success.