

1. **Behaviorism And Mentalism And Language Learning (A Contrastive Study)**

*By:-Nizar Hussein
College of Basic Education
Diala University / 2006*

1.Introduction

We engage in language processing almost every day of our lives .This processing takes place when we watch television,listen to radio,reading passing signboard while driving ,speaking with others and reading letters, newspapers,magazines and books .Usually these language activities are carried out with great ease and in a completely subconscious manner.

Language can be defined from different points of view; it can be defined as “the aspect of human behavior that involves the use of the vocal sounds in meaningful patterns and ,when they exit,corresponding written symboles,to form,,express and communicate thoughts and feelings(Harris and Sipay:1970:4).Most language-processing does not involve observable physical events such as eye-movement,but rather involves mental events in the mind that can be observed directly.Language processing events in the mind can be inferred from observable behaviour. As a result learning a foreign language helps us to appreciate thoughtfully man’s achievement and development in all fields of life.The task of which determine the appropriate techniques that can be used inside the classroom.

Teaching English as a foreign language has been discussed in various levels and several occasions,so developing teaching English as a foreign language has been the subject of foreign language discussion for many years through many conferences and studies.But still teaching techniques which are the implemental aspects of teaching process need more

attention and deeper investigation to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Teaching techniques play a vital role in the process of language learning .

Different kinds of teaching techniques have been used to improve teaching process. Methods of teaching English as a foreign language should be got from recent theories and international experiments carried in the field of language teaching and learning. Teacher's choice is not what method is best, but what techniques work best for practical combinations of individuals.

Behaviorism and Mentalism are two main schools concerning language learning and teaching .Each one has a different point of view towards language learning. The paper will discuss in detail the main principles for learning of these schools and explore the ideal method in language learning and teaching.

2. Behaviorism and Language Learning

Behaviorism was an important movement in learning. It was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It holds that nothing exists but matter. One version of materialism is behavior, it denies the existence of mind. Behaviorists insist that everything is described as the product of simple physical process. They restrict the subject-matter of psychology to human behavior and sets out to explain all kinds of behavior including speech and language (Lyons, 1981:242).

A foreign language is one which has no internal function in the learners country. It is learned in order to communicate with native speakers. Behaviorism appeared first at the beginning of this century by Watson who wrote an article mentioned the (behavior) for the first time in 1908.

Bloomfield was one of the most important figures of this theory who influenced the writings of Watson, so he expressed the main principles of this theory by defining language as (Language is behavior). According to Behaviorists, language learning is change in behavior. It refers to the conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules and being able to talk about them. Language teaching is the process which facilitates the process of language learning. Behaviorism explains that man was born with a blank sheet and language is behavior dealing with things that are observed and measured. Language, according to them, is a set of habits and a social process used even by uneducated people. It is not an individual process, but it is something posed by all members of society. They believed that language is a rigid system of patterns of contrastive features. Language is a matter of cooperation and interaction moving over to the field of psychology. Behaviorism is called Connectionism and Association. It is part of Impressionism.

The main figures of this school are (Watson, Thorndike, Pavlov, Skinner, etc). Bloomfield is considered one of the major figures who represented this school.

2.1 The Main Principles Of Behaviorism

1-Language learning is habit formation. It is similar to learning to type, so it is a conscious process.

2-Speech is very important to show the performance and evaluate learning through that performance. Performance is the actual use of language (Dineen, 1967:80). Language is behavior, so it is learned by behaving. Foreign language learning is a mechanical process. Teachers should feed the students step by step, so they are related to the behavioral psychology.

3-Drills are one of the important techniques used in language learning.

4-Stimulus-response is one of the main principles in language learning.

5-Reinforcement, repetition, trial and error are used widely in language learning. Motivation which is the desire to achieve proficiency in a new language in order to participate in the life of the community that speaks the language (Dulay et al., 1982:47). These psychological principles are emphasized in language learning.

6. Language is universal so there is more than one element participate in learning like society, learner, psychological facts, environments, teacher textbook, etc. They emphasize on the external factor that can be seen and observed.

7-Language teaching depends on analogy rather than on rules for teaching the structure of language.

2.2 Weakness of Behaviorism

The weak points of Behaviorism are the following:-

1-This school was derived from the study of the animals behavior (e.g Pavlov's dogs, Thorndike's chicken, Skinner's pigeons).

2-Learning depends on the principle of (stimulus-response) for animals, but the matter is completely different concerning language learning.

3-They claim that they can explain all kinds of behavior, but complex thoughts in language can not be explained in behavior.

4-Time should considerably be long enough for learning.

5-No regards are given to the innate capacity of human being in learning and give interest to what is seen and observed.

6-Continuity in the process of learning (stimulus-response).

7-Rewards must be given immediately in the process of learning

8-Chaining which means the respond is not rewarded until making another two or set to be chained.Teaching and learning can not be explained in the process of (stimulus- response),but it can be used to learn simple things only.

9-Some of the figures (Gestalt Theory) depended on the principle of problem-solving.Learning is not a problem to be solved.

10-Generalization in learning according to the law of identical elements .

3. Mentalism and Language Learning

It is another theory in learning.Mentalists believe that man is born with innate capacity for acquiring language and we only need to start it.Chomsky was one of the main figures who presented his theory in 1957.He considered Linguistics part of psychology .He glorifies the role of mind .Chomskys basic claim is that the grammars for human language are too complex and abstract to be learned on the basis of the type of experience to which children have access(O,Grady etal.,1987:494).

Therefore,Chomsky argues that significant components of the grammar must be inborn.He thinks that what we call the mind can be best described in terms a set of abstract structure whose physical basis is as yet relatively unknown. This power enables him learning a language.Mind is just like a mirror that reflects the average of learning.Competence is in the mind of ideal speaker-hearer.Learning and anything acquired is related to mind .This process possessed by the individual and developed in him as part of his maturation (competence-performance).Competence is the system of knowledge of language which can be formed in the mind of a person and it can be used to produce and develop gramatical utterances (Corder ,1973:93).

Chomsky explained that the principles of behaviorism didn't explain what happens in language learning because we can learn with and without these principles. It is unknown, but we can check its results.

3.1 The Main Principles Of Mentalism

1-Language is universal concerning language acquisition and language use .

2-Foreign language learning emphasized on the internal factors which are unseen. They think that each person has an innate capacity for using and learning language.

3-Most of the principles of Behaviorism like reinforcement, rewards, repetition, etc are not important because we can learn with and without these principles and there is no role for the external facts like environment and social facts in language learning.

4-Even if we know a great deal about the speaker, we can not expect when he will speak or what he will speak

5-Mentalists think that the correct response or the incorrect one does not mean that learning is done.

6-They are related to the competence and to the cognitive psychology.

3.2 Weakness of Mentalism

1-There is no role for the external factors in language learning. In fact, there is a great deal of these factors in language learning.

2-They emphasized on the innate capacity of learners only and neglected the other factors .

4 .Conclusions

Behavior can not be understood clearly if we had one side of that behavior the mental or the physical one,so, we find that speech is understood because it was a mental and physical reaction for human being as a behavior in his communication with others .But if we look at a man shaking his hand without any sound ,we may guess that he is celebrating or dancing or showing off or none of these things ,but if we combined the mental with the physical ,the whole behavior will be quite clear .Behavior of each human being is influenced by his capacity .This behavior either acquired or learned and this is influenced by the inherited attitude for reaction (understanding) and production;therefore we find that our behavior is difficult even if one is related to one family and we may behave in different ways of the same situation ,so he is influenced with the biological ,cultural,social and individual facts .In schools ,teachers try to develop the motor and mental skills of learners and guide them for better performance in school and community as a whole.The ideal method in learning is to put into consideration the principles of Behaviorism and Mentalism in language learning.

Bibliography

- 1-Corder, S. Pit (1973),***Introducing applied linguistics***, England Penguin Group Limited.
- 2-Dineen, Francis P.(1967),***An Introduction to General Linguistics***, Newyork Holt,Rinehart and Winston inc.
- 3-Dulay,H and etal (1982),***Language Two*** . England Oxford university Press.

4-Harris,Albert and Sipay Edward R.(1970),***How to teach Reading:A competency Based Program***, Newyork Longman Inc.

5-Lyons,John(1981),***Language and Linguistics***, Cambridge Cambridge university press

6- O,Grady William and etal (1987),***Contemporary Linguistics:An Introduction***, London Longman .