Psychological Bases of English Learning Process

Marisel M. Palaming
Lecturer, English General Requirement Unit Department
Sur University College, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract: The four behavioral learning theories were the focus of this article (1) Pavlov's Classical Conditioning gave emphasis on the association between the stimulus and response. As a result of his experiments, he discovered the three features of classical conditioning as follows: stimulus generalization, discrimination, and extinction. (2) Edward Thorndike's Connectionism believed that all learning is explained by bonds or connections that are formed between the stimulus and response. He further formulated the laws of learning: laws of readiness, exercise, and effect. (3) Pavlov and Thorndike started with stimulus-response; B.F. Skinner was more interested in explaining learning, which emphasized the consequence of behavior (operant conditioning). Skinner's ideas on reinforcement have led to broad acceptance of programmed instruction and computers as effective teaching tools. His views on punishment have clarified its meaning and use. (4) Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning stressed on the process whereby information we glean from observing others influence our behavior. He also gave emphasis to the impact of modeling that has shown the potency and far-reaching effects of this type of learning. Observational learning attempted to include the influence of cognitive process within a behavioral framework. The meaning of the English learning process, explained from different point of views, is given as follows: (a) English learning from the point of view of the Mind Theory, (b) English learning from the viewpoint of Connectionist’s Theory, (c) English learning from the perspective of Behaviorism, (d) English learning from side of the Gestaltists and (e) English learning from the explanation of the Progressivists.

Keywords: English Learning Process, Psychological Theories of Learning, Learning, Process, English Teaching, Student Learning

Psychological Bases of English Learning Process

The nature of the English learning process has been studied by expert and physiologists. Many researches have been performed and the literature on the subject is a lot. There has been continual progress in studying what is not known about learning. Each year sees new discoveries and new hypotheses. Some proposed hypotheses were proven wrong and some older discoveries were made to justify for major modification. Subjecting individuals and classes to scientific assessment has changed certain stages of learning from the realm of speculation to the realm of science. At present, there is no complete theory concerning all aspects of learning. There is considerable disagreement about the language to be used in describing learning. Different authors hold conflicting ideas on the scope of specificity of generally correct in taking about English learning.

English learning from the point of view of the Mind Theory – This theory was formulated by Christian Wolff in 1734. This theory states that the mind has mental power or faculties, such as memory. Reason, judgment, attention, will observation, and the like, each of which works as a separate part that can be enhance through exercise or use. According to the mind theory, all learning is training of the mind and developing the powers of its faculties. The believers of this theory state further that exercise of these powers in one aspect of content makes one more competent in the use of these same powers with other materials. The believers of this theory localized various psychological functions in the different areas of the content. Learning, thinking, and reasoning were usually allotted to the frontal lobes. Nevertheless, the appraisal of curriculum materials will show that myriad subjects are taught and numerous methodical devices are used for no better reason than that they supposedly possess value in training the mind.

English learning from the viewpoint of Connectionist’s Theory – This theory refers to the famous stimulus-response or S-R bond theory discussed by Thorndike. This point of view is based on the concepts that bonds or connections are formed between situations and responses. Thorndike advocates the idea that learning result from strengthening and weakening of bonds connections between situations and responses. The basis of learning is association between sense impressions and impulses to action. This point of view, learning happens through a change in the connections between a particular stimulus and a response, thus this theory regards connections as the key to the understanding of the learning process.

In the application of this theory in teaching, the teacher and the learner must know the characteristics of a good performance in order that practice may be appropriately arranged. Errors in performance must be diagnosed so that they will
not be repeated. When there is sick of clarity about what is being taught or learned, practice may be strengthening the needed connections may be weakened by disuse. From the connection’s point of view, factors which facilitate connections are frequency, recency, intensity, vividness, mood of the subject, similarity of situations, and capacity of the subject. It can be said that in practice, the connectionist’s theory seemed consistent with drill and habit formation and less applicable to learning based upon understanding and meaning.

**English Learning from the viewpoint of Behaviorism** – learning English from the Behaviorist’s point of view, refers to the building up of conditioned reflexes or habit formation resulting from conditioner. According to Watson, conditioned reflex is central to learning as the unit out of which habits are formed, Watson used Pavlov’s experiments as the epitome of learning and made of the condition reflex as the unit of habit, and built his system on that foundation. This one principle serves as the basis for a very ingenious and intriguing theory of learning. According to this theory, conditioning consists of setting up within the individual certain inner adjustments that will affect overt action. Behaviorism assumes that all human learning should be studied in terms of observable behavior, without any reference to consciousness. To them, practically all behavior is learned. Conditioning provides the model for explaining this process.

To the behaviorists, learning English is any change in the behavior of an organism. Such change may range from the acquisition of knowledge, simple skill, specific attitude, and opinions. Change may also refer to innovation, elimination, or modification of responses. Changes, when considered in terms of learning, are essentially a modification of behavior. To the behaviorists, human behavior has come to mean all observable behavior and learning as the modification and modification of that behavior in all its aspects. To them, education is fundamentally a matter of conditioning. Guthrie, like Thorndike, admits the phenomenon of conditioning but not as a formula for the explanation of all learning.

**Learning from viewpoint of the Gestaltists** – Gestalt means pattern, shape, form or configuration. It implies that a set off stimulating circumstances takes place according to the relative importance of various stimuli acting at the same time. This point of view recognizes that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, or that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, or that the whole gets its meaning from the parts. It can be seen that the parts can be understood only in relation to one another and that this relationship is determined by the nature of the whole. The central theme of this theory is that the conception of experience at any given moment is determined by the totality of its related phases which constitute an integral pattern of configuration.

Learning from this point of view is not complete until the new reactions have been thoroughly related and worked into the individual’s former experience so that his total experience, old and new, bearing on situations, will function as a unit in meeting similar situations later. In other words, learning is considered as the acquiring of knowledge, abilities, habits, and skill through the interaction of the whole individual and his total environment or situation. It means that responses must become an integral part of the active unified self in meeting life’s demands. This point of view regards learning as essentially experiencing, reacting, doing and understanding, not, not as mere matter of stimulus and responses, conditioned reflexes, and habit formation. Learning is an integrated response wherein the situation is perceived as a meaningful whole, with the various parts interdependent. To the believers of this theory, learning process proceeds best when the numerous and varied activities utilized by the learner are unified around a central core. The central core, to them, gives meaning to the activities.

**English Learning from the viewpoint of the Progressivists** – the concept of learning from progressivists’ point of view is in conformity with the integrative point of view which is based on Gestalt theory of learning. Both recognize the importance of the learner in the learning process, his interests, his attitudes, and above all, his ability to utilize the past experiences in meeting new situations. Both believe that there is no substitute for experience in the process. Likewise, learning is conceived by both in terms of the total growth of the student rather than the mastery of the subject-matter or changes in behavior. Both views are complementary and supplementary to each other.

In the progressivist’s conception of learning every person are both a teacher and a learner in every situation. The teacher operates in a two-fold capacity. He is a teacher or guide to everyone else with whom he associates and at the same time he is a learner from every other person with whom he comes in contact. Thus a teacher is a learner from who each student in the class and each student is a learner from every other student. He reads, studies, thinks, plans, advises and leads, but he expects each student to grow and develop in each of these same activities. If the team is to be retained in education, it must encompass more aspects of the total learning situations and must be based upon a more cooperative interactive relationship between the teachers and the learners.

**Educational Implication of Psychological Theories as Bases of English Learning Process**

A substantial amount of scientific knowledge is of potential value to teachers. Thus, the Behavioral Learning Theories offer suggestions to a teacher on
how to apply the proof of knowledge to learners in
or out of the classroom. The teachers develop the
awareness of the role that stimuli can play in a
student’s behavior;

Generalization – if you observe that a student is
nervous in your class, try to discover what
circumstances triggered that fear or anxiety, which
is, try to identify the stimulus acting at the time.
Find out whether your anxious students are relaxed
elsewhere in school. Observe them carefully and
identify the situations where they are most anxious
– in the classroom; on the playground or in the
library.

Continue monitoring to narrow your search to
discover the stimulus that actually produced the
fear or anxiety. Is he a tall classmate bullying that
student? Or is it your relationship with them? If so,
then the student’s nervousness results from fear of
adults or parental pressure over grades. If grades
are the cause, then the fear is the unconditioned
response. Take steps to introduce non-provoking
stimuli with those stimuli that caused the anxiety.
Try to obtain parental cooperation; ask parents to
downplay any threatening feelings about the child’s
grades. Help the child instead in preparing for any
examination by reassuring the child. Lastly, help
the child to succeed without showing favoritism.

Discrimination - stress to your students how
important it is to distinguish things that seem alike
but are different. Example: the color red in a traffic
light may mean stop, it also means intense love, or
somebody is in danger. One can now discriminate
because of prior experiences. Provide continued
practice for your students to be used in searching
for differences. For example, p and b, w and v, 6
and 9, 41 and 14, etc.

Extinction - assist students to have realistic
concerns. Students from Mt. Pinatubo lahar areas,
for example, may be anxious about the sound of
rampaging lahar flows or raindrops. The teacher
can encourage them to tell and retell their
experiences, or talk to them in a reassuring manner.
Prevent responses that encourage misbehavior.
During seatwork, a class jester continues to create
noise, even if reprimanded. In many instances,
teachers turn away after a scene, and other
students, by gesture or whisper, urge the child on.
If you continue to monitor the situation, they will
be unable to offer encouragement, and the behavior
should stop.

On Connectionism - this explains learning by
selecting and connecting. The law of readiness
does not force the child to go to school if she/he is
not yet ready. Indications that show that he/she is
ready to learn are the following: interest, sustained
interest, and improvement in his/her performance
(e.g.) writing, reading. Abstract or logical thinking
activities start in high school. The law of exercise
and effect - drill exercises on the four fundamental
operations in Math to last for 5-10 minutes before
every start of the subject is suggested, with praises
for correct answers. Students who perfected the
drill exercises can serve as leaders in that drill.
Listing at least 3-5 new words with correct
meaning during Communication Arts classes (both
Filipino and English) and calling students at
random to use them in a sentence may strengthen
the connections. Students who consistently get
perfect in the drill exercises should be listed in the
class bulletin board. "Who's Who" for the week.
The same can be done to students who frequently
volunteer to give correct meanings to new words
and use them in sentences. Students who never get
the correct answers or never volunteer should be
noticed, for you to do some counseling.

On Operant Conditioning - this is concerned with
the consequence of behavior. When students
respond, react to their behavior as quickly-
possible, immediately if you can. Your reaction
may be either positive or negative. If you allow
enough time to lapse between a student's responses
and your reaction, you have lost much of its
impact. Don't assume that you know why students
do or don't do something. In that case, you are
guessing. Work with what students say or do and
reinforce (or punish) that behavior in an attempt to
shape their behavior in the desired direction. Be
sure that you know exactly what you want your
students to do; otherwise, you reinforce behavior
that may or may not lead to desirable objectives.
Control the reinforcer, control the behavior. The
moment you get to know your students, you'll be
able to identify those reinforcements that they
particularly like. Be sure to make students
understand why they are being reinforced and if
you _apply reinforcement, apply them to specific
behavior. For example, you may say "Very good,
you got the correct answer." On the other hand, if
you use punishment, explain also why the
punishment is being given and be sure to use the
appropriate punishment for a particular behavior.
Be aware of the nature and timing of your
reinforcement. Teachers are often criticized for
giving too much positive reinforcement. Decide
how frequently you must reinforce a student.
Frequency will vary from student to student.
Students who have problems with their self-esteem
or lack of confidence, for example, may need
frequent reinforcement; however, gradually reduce
it. Teachers who reinforce too frequently find that
students work only for the reinforcement and so
reinforcement becomes meaningless. If this
happens to your class, initiate class discussions,
and try to lead students in arriving at the realization
that learning itself is satisfying and important.

On Social Cognitive Learning - this means that the
information we process from observing other
people, things, and events influence the way we
act.

(1) Learning English occurs from observing, others
even when the observer doesn’t practice the
observed behavior. Have a film showing on any hot issues such as child abuse, drug trafficking, prostitution, mail-order bride, etc. The group of students to discuss the role of the characters, the value, and the realizations or insights of that film. Flash names of national heroes or of modern day heroes. Discuss with your-students what they did to be considered as heroes. What are the criteria for one to be called a hero?

(2) Important processes are involved in observational learning. Reinforcement occurs when children reenact what they have observed after an educational trip. Reading a story is one activity where students may act out the main character and reproduce a scene in the class. This may be followed by a discussion of the main idea, the characterization, and the plot. In high school, you may center the attention of students to the sequencing or the steps in conducting a simple research. After this, you may leave the students alone in conducting their own research. Ill In using observational learning, you may consider several sources of information that may also serve as motivational tools. Cooperative learning provides students with the opportunity to show each other how to work together to complete a project. Peer tutoring is another method to encourage a learner to imitate another's skill in performing a special task. Group processes such as group dynamic activities and interactions are another means to influence the behavior of other students. This are the ways in which learning English is a process.

References