



THE COGNITIVE-CODE APPROACH

M. VIJAYALAKSHMI,

Research Scholar, (PP.ENG.0096)

Rayalaseema University .

Kurnool, Andhrapradesh (AP), **INDIA.**

ABSTRACT

There are many theories on English as second language teaching or foreign language teaching. The cognitive-code approach of the 1970s emphasized that language learning involved active mental processes. Lessons focused on learning grammatical structures but the cognitive code approach emphasized the importance of meaningful practice, and the structures were presented inductively, i.e. the rules came after exposure to examples. There was, however, little use of examples from authentic material.

Key words: *ESL, meaningful practice, grammatical structuresetc.*

INTRODUCTION

As its name implies the cognitive approach deals with mental processes like memory and problem solving. By emphasizing mental processes, it places itself in opposition to behaviorism, which largely ignores mental processes. Yet, in many ways the development of the cognitive approach, in the early decades of the 20th century, is intertwined with the behaviorist approach. For example, Edwin Tolman, whose work on "cognitive maps" in rats made him a cognitive pioneer, called himself a behaviorist. Similarly, the work of David Krech (aka Ivan Krechevsky) on hypotheses in maze learning was based on behaviorist techniques of observation and measurement. Today, the cognitive approach has overtaken behaviorism in terms of popularity, and is one of the dominant approaches in contemporary psychology.

English language teachers need to know about cognitive theory:

In the genes of cognitive theory, there is a great deal of intuitive appeal to the cognitive approach to teaching. The teachers, no matter native teacher or non-native, are ready to consider cognitive theory as the foundation for teaching if they apply the following issues that that distill the theoretical basis of cognitive foreign language learning.

- It must be noted that the application of cognitive theory implies a responsibility to teach both content and process.
- The learner is at centre stage; the teacher, educator, or instructor becomes a facilitator of learning, carrying the task of adapting the newly learned foreign language structures to the needs of learners.
- Cognitive theory acknowledges the role of mistakes; therefore, a cognitive-minded foreign language teacher makes learners aware of the rules and should encourage students to create correct structures in applying the rules.
- The theory attaches more importance to the learner's understanding of the structure of the foreign language than to the facility in using that structure
- Cognitively- minded foreign language teachers pay attention to assimilation: assimilation of what has already been learnt or partly learnt since how new rules are presented is important.
- There is a fundamental relationship between language and culture. Foreign Language is at the heart of language teaching and learning. The way the teachers teach language reflects the way how much they have mastered and understood the target language as a profession.
- In Cognitive Theory, language practice drills are employed to train learners to talk and to help them master the basic structural patterns of the target language.

Historical Background:

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the fields of psychology and linguistics were experiencing a sort of upheaval. Behaviorism, which had dominated psychology for several decades, was called into question by cognitive psychologists, who asserted that stimulus-response conditioning could not account for all the complexities of human learning. With respect to language learning, a young linguist named Noam Chomsky questioned B. F. Skinner's assumption that language use was also purely a conditioned behavior. In 1959 Chomsky wrote a critical review of B. F. Skinner's book *Verbal Behavior* (1957), in which he pointed out that humans are constantly producing and understanding new utterances, a process that cannot be explained by behavioristic theories.

These developments in psychology and linguistics eventually filtered into foreign language classrooms. During much of the 1950s and 60s the Audio lingual Method, which was based on behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics, had dominated American classrooms. As

these theories were called into question, the Audio lingual Method lost credibility as well. In addition to violating the new theories of learning, the ALM's focus on memorization and drills left little opportunity for students to use language creatively, and therefore did not foster the ability to communicate in spontaneous situations. In addition, some students and teachers expressed frustration with the lack of implicit grammar explanation and the lock-step pace of the class, which allowed for little variation in learning styles or speeds.

By 1970 the behaviorist assumptions of the ALM had been largely replaced, at least in principle, with a "cognitive code approach" to language learning. Rivers (1981) affirms that the cognitive code approach "was much discussed but ill defined and consequently never gained the status of what one might call a method" (p. 49). Nevertheless, cognitive principles began to play a significant role in foreign language classrooms and continue to do so.

Advantages

Cognitive-code approach refers to a theory of second language teaching and learning as a ferment of cognitivist psychology, structural applied linguistic, Chomsky's theories developed in the 1960s.

Cognitive-code approach has some advantages over the other foreign language learning and teaching theories:

1. It revived the re-emergence of grammar in the classroom.
2. It put more emphasis on guided discovery of the rules: this is the rule-governed nature of language.
3. It rejected the habit formation of Behaviorist theory. There is language acquisition rather than habit formation.
4. Learning is not a habit formation but requires cognitive processing and mental effort because learners are thinking beings.
5. It stressed on the learning of the rules via meaningful practice and creativity.
6. It liberated the teachers from the strait jackets of Grammar Translation Approach, Audio- Lingualism and Structural-situational methods.

Disadvantages:

It placed a great deal of emphasis on the development of a second language as a combination of skills. At its core, cognitive-code learning represents a theoretical, rather than a pedagogical approach.

1. Cognitive-Code Approach is essentially a theoretical proposal because it did not lead to the development of any teaching method in relation to classroom procedures and activities.
2. There is little use of examples from authentic material.
3. It never took off in a big way; this theory did not gain support over time.
4. Human thinking is said to be an invisible process, and therefore cognitive processes are hypothetical constructs.
5. Human information processing is resembled computers, which perhaps oversimplifies the human mind; human brain is much more sophisticated than computer systems.
6. As a theory, it often ignores past experiences and culture influence while we process information.
7. CCA does not consider individual personalities of people and how personalities are formed; there is too much emphasis on social context.
8. It is a depersonalized theory; in other words, it does not take into consideration feelings or unconscious actions or reactions.
9. According to Carroll (1966:102), “the theory attaches more importance to the learner understands of the structure of the foreign language than to the facility in using that structure.
10. Another disadvantage is that it is extremely time intensive on the part of the foreign language teacher or educator, who, acts as a facilitator, has to invest a huge amount of time and effort on a per student basis.

Conclusion:

CCA came to the fore when Chomsky stated a severe attack on Behaviorist learning Approach in 1957. Behaviorism and structuralism were rejected by Chomsky’s theory of language (1965), which refuses the learning theories of behaviorism. Chomsky argued that



humans are born with a wired device, which he called language acquisition device (LAD), where Universal Grammar (UG) operates. CCA accepts the Universal Grammar of Chomsky, which underlies all Grammars (Hinkel, 2006). Not everyone agreed with the Chomsky's theory of SLA. . In the current perspective on second language learning, CCA is largely seen as an updated variety of the traditional grammar-translation method, with an attendant goal of overcoming the shortfalls of the audio- lingual approach.

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