**LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORIES**

**BEHAVIORISM**

LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORIES

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CONCEPTS UNDER STUDY LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

**Definition**

Behaviorim attempts to explain how humans learn and develop their behaviors. This theory claims that behaviors are developed through interaction with the environment. According to Behaviorists, all kinds of behaviors including language learning develop through a process of habit formation using

STIMULUS

RESPONSE

REINFORCEMENT REPETITION

REWARD OR PUNISHMENT

It is worth noting that the founders of Behaviorism do not take into account the impact of biological, mental, and psychological factors. In the behaviorist jargon, language is defined as human behavior and learning is referred to as conditioning.

**Types of Learning/Conditioning**

1. **CLASSICAL CONDITIONING**
2. **OPERANT CONDITIONING**
3. **SOCIAL CONDITIONING**

**1.Classical Conditioning**

Classical conditioning  is based upon Pavlov’s experiment. During one of his experiments about animals’ behaviors, Pavlov has observed that dogs salivate when they see food. However, they do not respond in the same way when hearing the ringing of a bell. So he decided to change the dogs’ behavior and make them salivate in response to a bell’s ring. In order to achieve his goal, he started to ring a bell before presenting food to a dog. After having repeated the same behavior many times, the dog has started to salivate every time it heard the sound of a bell. Such behavioral change could be attributed to the fact that the dog has simply created a sort of association between the sound of the bell and food. Thus, Pavlov has succeeded in modifying the dog’s behavior.

The same techniques are used in second language learning. SLA teachers usually provide pictures of objects to their students with their corresponding appellations. Obviously, students are expected to repeat after having heard the word until they internalize the association between the picture and the word. Eventually, they will be able to use it without the help of the picture.

**2. OPERANT CONDITIONING :** B.F Skinner has developed operant conditioning which is different from the classical type. It is based on the principle that the learner will repeat the same behavior in ancipation for a reward or he will avoid some behavior in fear of punishment. Accordingly, second language learners will work hard to get good marks and teachers’ positive feedback. They will also avoid making mistakes in order not to get teachers’ negative feedback because of their bad marks.

**3.** **Social Conditioning :** is founded upon the premise that learners will imitate the people they admire most. Hence, teachers should set good models for their learners. Because if the learners like their teacher, they will easily learn. However, if they dislike him, they will never learn.

**The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

Learning a second language is not an easy task as it faces many challenges. The biggest of these challenges is L1 interference. L2 learners already know a first language and generally transfer rules of L1 into L2. This will inexorably cause them to make mistakes. It is for this reason that behaviorists have created what came to be known as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

The Contrastive analysis hypothesis postulates that we should establish a comparison between L1 and L2 in order to identify similarities and differences. Similarities facilitate learning while differnces provoke errors. It is also based on the premise that we need to predict these errors before they happen, provide solutions to overcome errors, but also provide immediate correction and make learners repeat the correct forms.

**Examples of L1 Interference:**

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis postulates that Algerian students will learn English with the interference of two languages namely Arabic and French and will probably make the following mistakes :

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **L1 STRUCTURES** | **L2 ERRORS** |
| ذهب مصطفى الى المدرسة | Went Mustapha to school |
| J’ai passé l’examen | I passed the exam. |
| المنرل جميل | The house beautiful |
| Elle est intelligente | She is intelligente |

1. They will start a sentence with a verb. FIRST EXAMPLE
2. They will use false friends that they will transfer into English. SECOND EXAMPLE
3. They will use sentences without the verb to be as in Arabic. THIRD EXAMPLE
4. They will use the final ‘e’ in reference to the feminine form in French. FOURTH EXAMPLE

Thus, both teachers and text book designers need to be aware of these errors and provide practice activities to prevent the occurrence of such errors. However, when they happen, teachers must provide immediate feedback to get them corrected. It should not go unnoticed that CAH has been criticized for two main reasons. First, some of the predicted errors did not actually happen. Second, It could not predict all of the errors that students actually made because they were not related to the difference between L1 and L2. They were caused by the overgeneralizations of second language rules for instance regular and irregular verbs.

As a result, CAH has been replaced by its weak version which is Error Analysis. The main difference between them is that Error analysis analyses errors after they are made by learners to understand why they occur and give remedial work to eliminate them. By contrast, Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis predicts errors and attempts to prevent them before they happen.

**Limitations of Behaviorism :**

The behaviorist view has received harsh criticism because of several limitations. First, it overuses mechanical blind repetitions which consequently kills the learners creativity. Second, it focuses too much on accuracy and ignores fluency. Errors are not tolerated at all, even those which do not affect the meaning of the message. Another criticism which has been leveled against Behaviorism is that it does not recognize the rôle of internal factors such as feelings, thoughts, cognitive processes in affecting learning. Finally, it does not take into consideration individual differences among learners. It treats them as a herd that learns through repetition.

Despite criticism, Behaviorism has provided a theoritical framework for several language teaching methods such as the Audiolingual and the Total Physical Response Methods. Even today, instances of Behaviorism are still identified in practices and techniques used by teachers in modern day language teaching classrooms.