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Constructionism in Language Pedagogy; Usage-based Approach to Foreign/Second Language Learning

Extended summary

Language is a complex, highly adaptable, ever-changing system. Many diverse agents interact and underlie language learning and language behaviour ranging from linguistic, social, psychological, cognitive, cultural etc. The aim of this paper is to present the major tenets of constructional approach to language pedagogy and point to the key factors that affect second/foreign language (L2) acquisition. In addition, we wish to highlight the importance of a mother tongue (L1) in the process of L2 learning and teaching. L1 represents a foundation for one's conceptualization of the world as our L1 background largely shapes the way we see the world, what Slobin (1996) calls "thinking for speaking". Moreover, the paper shows the similarities that L1 and L2 learning share and points to dissimilarities (e.g. L1 being learnt unconsciously while L2 studially and consciously).

Constructionism in language pedagogy is defined as a cognitive-oriented usage-based approach to second language acquisition. It relies on the principles of Construction Grammar (CxG). Construction Grammar qualifies as an empirical method of language analysis which aims to analyze and describe language in its authentic and actual use (Vujić, 2016: 63). According to Ellis, if words are atoms of language, then Construction Grammar is a molecular approach to language study (Ellis, 2002).

Constructionism in language pedagogy is a reaction to the communicative approach, which, despite its extreme popularity, failed to deliver on results in L2 speakers' overall productive language performance. The main reasons for that are twofold. Firstly, L1 competence was entirely banned from L2 learning and teaching process. Secondly, communicative approach to language teaching was modular in nature seeing the language as a modular system which con-

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sists of the following distinctive sub-systems: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.

Constructionist approach embraces the notion of construction as seen in CxG; construction is a symbolic sign that stands as a general multi-dimensional pattern for licensing and recognizing the well-formed utterances. Therefore, grammar is a complex language system containing an array of construction-types that are organized in a network of interdependent and complementary patterns (Vujić, 2016: 23).

The paper presents and elaborates on the following four elements that critically affect L2 constructional knowledge in L2 students: a) frequency of language forms, b) prototypicality of language forms, c) contingency of language forms, and d) implicit vs. explicit learning.

Compared to other modularly-oriented second-language acquisition approaches which treat lexical language component independently from the grammatical and pragmatic, the constructionist approach, as a usage-based approach, offers at least the following two comparative methodological advantages:

a) *Evenly balanced coverage of language phenomena.* L2 students are presented with L2 in forms of complex constructions containing lexical and grammatical data and content. Such constructions are parts of both linguistic and extra-linguistic and situational context, which enhances L2 students' communicative competence (Vujić, 2016: 71).

6) *Practicality.* Linguistic units of different linguistic nature (phonological, morho-syntactic, pragmatic, etc.) are presented simultaneously as parts of language chunks, which enables L2 students to simultaneously process diverse language information. Thus, every aspect of language competence (grammatical, lexical, pragmatic and cultural) is being built at the same time (Vujić, 2016: 72).

However, the current teaching practices could benefit from teaching materials which would better integrate and fuse grammatical and lexical constructions in the samples of L2 used for L2 learning/teaching.

Although this paper primarily deals with English as L2, we hope that the successful constructionist practices applied on English as L2 language learning could be of benefit to those teaching other languages as L2.

Keywords: mother-tongue (L1), foreign language (L2), construction, frequency, form/meaning.

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