LEARNING STYLE IN ARABIC LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Arabic students learn in many ways—by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing. Teaching methods also vary. Some instructors lecture, others demonstrate or discuss; some focus on rules and others on examples; some emphasize memory and others understanding. How much a given student learns in a class is governed in part by that student’s native ability and prior preparation but also by the compatibility of his or her characteristic approach to learning and the instructor’s characteristic approach to teaching. The ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information are collectively termed the individual’s learning style.

Field of Research: sensing and intuitive learners, visual and verbal learners, active and reflective learners, sequential and global learners, inductive and deductive learners.

1. Introduction

Arabic language learners studied in various learning style. The proposed learning style dimensions by Richard and Eunice (1995) may be defined through five dimensions. There are sensing and intuitive learners, visual and verbal learners, active and reflective learners, sequential and global learners, inductive and deductive learners.

2. Sensing and Intuitive Learners

Sensing and intuitive learners describe two ways in which people tend to perceive the world by sensation and intuition. Sensing involves observing, gathering data through the senses; intuition involves indirect perception by way of the subconscious—accessing memory, speculating, imagining. Sensors tend to be concrete and methodical, intuitors to be abstract and imaginative. Sensors like facts, data, and experimentation; intuitors deal better with principles, concepts, and theories. Sensors are patient with detail but do not like complications; intuitors are bored by detail and welcome complications. Sensors are more inclined than intuitors to rely on memorization as a learning strategy and are more comfortable learning and following rules and standard procedures. Therefore, learning Arabic Language in class is suitable to be applied with sensors because students must memorize new words every day because Arabic is a foreign language. Intuitors like variety, dislike repetition, and tend to be better equipped than sensors to accommodate new concepts and exceptions to rules. Sensors are careful but may be slow; intuitors are quick but may be careless. The sensors used a variety of memorization strategies like internal drills and flash cards, liked class material that might better be described as practical rather than fanciful, and liked highly structured and well organized classes with clear goals and milestones for achievement. Intuitors preferred teaching approaches that involved greater complexity and variety, tended to be bored with drills and...
were better able than sensors to learn independently of the instructor’s teaching style. Basic language instruction that involves a great deal of repetitive drill and memorization of vocabulary and grammar is better suited to sensors than intuitors. Intuitive language instructors may tend to move too quickly through the basic vocabulary and rules of grammar in their eagerness to get to “the more interesting material”—grammatical complexities, nuances of translation, linguistic concepts, and cultural considerations. To be effective, language instruction should therefore contain elements that appeal to sensors and other elements that appeal to intuitors.

3. Visual and Verbal Learners

Visual and Verbal Learners describe about three ways people receive sensory information as visual, verbal and other (tactile, gustatory, olfactory). Visual learners prefer that information be presented visually—in pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations—rather than in spoken or written words. In learning Arabic Language, listening skills are learning through visual way such as watching Arabic movies, listening Arabic program in radio, watching television program and others. Verbal learners prefer spoken or written explanations to visual presentations. Learning Arabic Language in speaking, reading, and writing skills need to be explained by spoken and written. The third category (touch, taste, smell) plays at most a marginal role in language instruction. Recent studies of learning styles in foreign language education (e.g., Oxford & Ehrman, 1993) consistently place reading in the visual category, implying that instructors can meet the needs of visual learners solely by relying on written instructional material. Certainly visual learners learn better if they see and hear words in the target language, but so do auditory learners: presenting the same material in different ways invariably has a reinforcing effect on retention. The challenge to teacher is to devise ways of augmenting their verbal classroom presentation with nonverbal visual material—for example, showing photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to reinforce presentation of vocabulary words, and using films, videotapes, and dramatizations to illustrate lessons in dialogue and pronunciation.

4. Active and Reflective Learners

Active and Reflective Learners describe the complex mental processes by which perceived information is converted into knowledge can be conveniently grouped into two categories: active experimentation and reflective observation (Kolb 1984). Active processing involves doing something in the external world with the information—discussing it or explaining it or testing it in some way—and reflective processing involves examining and manipulating the information introspectively. Active learners learn well in situations that enable them to do something physical, such as learning Arabic in the textbooks using the material written in there, and students get information from it. But, reflective learners learn well in situations that provide them with opportunities to think about the information being presented such as learning Arabic textbooks, and then reflect the subject lessons with the meaning of Qur’ān. Language classes in which all students are relegated to passive roles, listening to and observing the teacher and taking notes, do little to promote learning for either active or reflective learners. Language classes should therefore include a variety of active learning experiences, such as conversations, enactment of dialogues and mini-dramas, and team competitions, and reflective experiences, such as brief writing exercises and question formulation exercises.

Small-group exercises can be extremely effective for both active and reflective learners (Johnson et al., 1991). Group work must be used with care, however: simply telling students to work together on problems or projects can do more harm than good. Reid (1987) studied students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and found that every background expressed a minor or negative
preference for group work, with English speakers giving it the lowest rating. When language students have been taught cooperative skills, however, they showed positive results in both language skill and altruism (Gunderson & Johnson 1980; Jacob & Mattson 1987).

5. Sequential and Global Learners

Sequential and Global Learners describe sequential learners absorb information and acquire understanding of material in small connected chunks, and global learners take in information in seemingly unconnected fragments and achieve understanding in large holistic leaps. Global learners may appear slow and do poorly on homework and tests until they grasp the total picture, but once they have it they can often see connections that escape sequential learners. On the other hand, sequential learners can function with incomplete understanding of course material, but they may lack a grasp of the broad context of a body of knowledge and its inter relationships with other subjects and disciplines. Oxford (1990) proposes that this learning style dimension can be tapped through studies of brain hemisphericity. She cites studies of Leaver (1986) suggesting that left-brain (sequential) thinkers deal more easily with grammatical structure and contrastive analysis, while right-brain (global) thinkers are better at learning language intonation and rhythms.

Sequential learners gravitate toward strategies that involve dissecting words and sentences into component parts and are comfortable with structured teaching approaches that stress grammatical analysis; therefore it could be applied to learn Arabic grammar.

Global learners prefer holistic strategies such as guessing at words and searching for main ideas, and may respond well to relatively unstructured approaches like community language learning that might not appeal to sequential learners and might be applied in reading texts of Arabic Language.

6. Inductive and Deductive Learners

Inductive and deductive learners: A Perspective on the Language learning/acquisition dichotomy describes induction is a reasoning progression that proceeds from particulars (observations, measurements, and data) to generalities (rules, laws, theories). In Arabic Language, is called ṭariqat aistiqrāʾiyat(طريقة استقرائية).

An example, learning of Arabic grammar begin with introduce the examples in sentence, following by the rules and theories of the grammar. Deduction proceeds in the opposite direction. In inductive presentation of classroom material, one makes observations and infers governing or correlating principles; in deductive presentation one starts with axioms, principles, or rules, deduces consequences, and formulates applications. In Arabic Language, is called ṭariqat aistinbāṭiyat(طريقة استنباطية).

This method was applied in teaching by showing the principles of topic in Arabic grammar, and then followed by example in the sentence.

A large percentage of classroom teaching in every subject is primarily or exclusively deductive, probably because deduction is an efficient and elegant way to organize and present material that is already understood. However, there is considerable evidence that incorporating a substantial inductive component into teaching promotes effective learning. Inductive reasoning is thought to be an important component in academic achievement (Ropo, 1987). Current cognitive research emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge in learning (Glaser, 1984); introducing new material by linking it to observed or previously known material is essentially inductive. The benefits claimed for inductive instructional approaches (e.g., discovery or inquiry learning) include increased academic achievement and enhanced abstract reasoning skills (Taba, 1966), longer retention of information (McConnell 1934; Swenson 1949), and improved ability to apply principles (Lahti, 1986).

The distinction between induction and deduction is akin to the distinction between language acquisition and learning. To acquire a language means to pick it up gradually, gaining the ability to communicate with it without necessarily being able to articulate the rules. Individuals absorb what
they can from the abundant and continuous input that bombards them; they cannot grasp all they hear, but each day increases their ability to understand, retain, and use in conversation what they have taken in. Throughout the process they gain in their ability to transfer strategies, make assumptions about the new language system, formulate and test rules, and either keep or abandon them. They continue this process (most of which is subconscious) until they fossilize, which they may do as soon as they feel they have learned what they need to in order to communicate in the language (Coulter, 1983). In its progression from specifics to generalizations, acquisition is an inductive process. On the other hand, language learning is a largely conscious process that involves formal exposure to rules of syntax and semantics followed by specific applications of the rules, with corrective feedback reinforcing correct usage and discouraging incorrect usage. The flow of the learning process from general to specific suggests its characterization as a deductive process. Three well-known approaches illustrate deductive and inductive approaches to language instruction. The first is the grammar translation method, rooted in the formal teaching of Latin and Greek that prevailed in Europe for many centuries (Rivers, 1968). This method involves the translation of literary texts followed by explanation (in the students’ native language) of rules of grammar. A later approach is the direct method, in which classes are taught entirely in the target language; grammar is taught inferentially and plays a secondary role to oral communication. This approach, which was in vogue in many countries throughout the nineteenth century (Allen & Corder 1975, 18), is almost purely inductive. The third approach is the audio-oral method, according to which language is a set of habits with vocabulary being of secondary concern. In this method, which was influenced by behavioral psychology and structural linguistics, students learn by repeating structural patterns and eventually automatize the structures, aided by positive reinforcement provided by the teacher. This approach combines acquired verbal skills (inductive) with learned reading and writing skills (deductive), with emphasis on the former. The key question facing language educators, what classroom conditions and procedures facilitate the occurrence of language acquisition? An important consideration in attacking this question has to do with the use to which an acquired or learned language is likely to be applied. By its very nature, language acquisition is more likely to manifest in oral fluency than in correct utilization of the written language and conversely for language learning. Complete command of a language thus involves both acquisition—an inductive process, required to speak fluently—and learning—a deductive process, required to write grammatically. The two processes are not competitive but complementary.

7. Multi-Style Approach to Arabic Language

A multi-style approach to foreign language education show that matching teaching styles to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement, student attitudes, and student behavior at the primary and secondary school level (Griggs & Dunn 1984; Smith & Renzulli 1984), however, Smith and Renzulli (1984) caution that stress, frustration, and burnout may occur when students are subjected over extended periods of time to teaching styles inconsistent with their learning style preferences. What must be done to achieve effective foreign language learning is to balance instructional methods, somehow structuring the class so that all learning styles are simultaneously—or at least sequentially. Fortunately, instructors who wish to address a wide variety of learning styles need not make drastic changes in their instructional approach. The way they normally teach addresses the needs of at least five of the specified learning style categories: regular use of at least some of the instructional techniques given below should suffice to cover the remaining five.

Motivate learning could be balance concrete information (word definitions, rules for verb conjugation and adjective-noun agreement) (sensing) and conceptual information (syntactical and semantic patterns, comparisons and contrasts with the students’ native language) (intuition) in every course at every level, balance structured teaching approaches that emphasize formal training
(deductive, sequential) with more open-ended unstructured activities that emphasize conversation and cultural contexts of the target language (inductive, global), make liberal use of visuals, assign some repetitive drill exercises to provide practice in basic vocabulary and grammar (sensing) but don’t overdo it (intuitive), do not fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the board. Raise questions and problems to be worked on by students in small groups; enact dialogues and mini-dramas; hold team competitions (active), give students the option of cooperating on at least some homework assignments (active). Active learners generally learn best when they interact with others; if they are denied the opportunity to do so they are being deprived of their most effective learning tool, balance inductive and deductive presentation of course material. Instruct some or all of the class in the language being taught, to facilitate language acquisition and develop skill in oral communication (inductive). In parallel, provide explicit instruction in syntax and semantics to facilitate formal language learning and develop skill in written communication and interpretation (deductive).

References

