

Characteristics of Pre-School Children in Chinese Learning

ZENG Hongjun^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate Professor, College of Arts, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 18 December 2015; accepted 20 March 2016

Published online 26 April 2016

Abstract

The characteristics of pre-school children's Chinese learning are: Being dominated by oral communication; instinctive acquisition; acceleration development of learning; learning in context and obviously student-centered learning.

Key words: Pre-school children; Chinese; Learning; Characteristics

Zeng, H. J. (2016). Characteristics of Pre-School Children in Chinese Learning. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 12(4), 46-49. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/8269>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8269>

INTRODUCTION

Preschool children's learning (this article only discusses normal children, and the children with special needs, such as the deaf are not in discussion) of Chinese is the most important thing in his language learning. Studies of the Chinese education have pointed out that student before the entrance had already mastered seventy-five percent of the primary school Chinese learning content. During this period, it is particularly important for children mainly to obtain oral language and oral communication capabilities, laying a solid foundation for the development and acquisition of written language skills in the future. The study found that human language ability before the age of 7-8 has three important critical period of development: The birth of 8-10 months is critical period in which infants begin to understand semantics; one and a half is critical

period in which infants begin to form verbal language; the age of five and a half is critical period in which children master grammar, understand abstract vocabulary, as well as begin to form comprehensive language skills. Children's appropriate language skills will get ideal development with scientific, systematic, and personalized education and guidance in this period. And once missing the critical period will result in lack of development. If there is non-scientific and eclectic education, it will seriously affect the development of children's language skills in this critical period and then serious deviations which will cause an obstacle to the future development appear. Therefore, children's learning of Chinese during this period cannot be ignored; on the contrary, it should be paid much attention.

Children's Chinese learning in this period has its own characteristics compared with primary and secondary school Chinese learning, mainly in the following aspects.

1. COMMUNICATIVE LEARNING

The normal communication of the pre-school children with people around is the foundation of survival and development. People's daily communication is impossible to leave the tool of oral language. In order to get along well with people around as soon as possible, pre-school children must learn oral communication. As a result, for pre-school children in the first and foremost step of learning Chinese is to learn oral communication. Pre-school children in the older stages (such as 3-6) can also learn written forms of language, but generally supportive of learning. The most important is oral communication.

The principal problem pre-school children are faced with now is to adapt to the environment as soon as possible, with the greatest access to things they need to grow (including physical (such as food) and spiritual needs (such as love). The physical development of pre-school children starts from near zero, and they are at

the most vulnerable stage of life. In this stage, they are eager for the world's help, but the one who is able to determine their fate is their up-bringer (the people who can and tend to give help to pre-school children, including parents and the person around who provides help). How to get things for growth of up-bringer is the situation pre-school children have to face. The ability to carry on good communication with up-bringer is with on doubt the most important skill they must have. The ways and means of their communication can have many types, but verbal communication becomes the most important for its convenience, understandability, accuracy, universal relevance. Pre-school children can smoothly get what they need through learning speaking from people around and communicating with them. Their learning of oral communication comes from the necessity for their survival. It is spontaneous and with much utilitarian.

2. INSTINCTIVE ACQUISITION

As for children's language acquisition, (mainly refers to the children's oral language acquisition), is either by instinct or with the efforts of hard working, the experts hold on various opinions, but most experts believe that is formed by natural ability and hardworking. The focuses are not the same in different stages of age. Human beings are born with a language acquisition device. Only by language acquisition devices, it is possible to offer explanations for the facts that all human beings have the ability of acquiring a language. During the process of oral interactive communication learning of pre-school children, the acceptance of the neural stimulation of oral language information is very important, but the neural mechanisms of oral language processing in their brain are more important.

Modern Brain Science has confirmed that the left hemisphere of the brain contains the main functional area which is in charge of language and speech. These functional areas work together with other functional areas of the brain and they together form a compact system, enabling people to talk, write and so on. One could talk is the result of the needs of social communication, but the neuro-physiological basis of the ability to speak is the human speech mechanism of the brain. The normal development of human's speech mechanisms of the brain is essential for the development of human speech. Chomsky believes that children's master the native language is not through the acquisition by the way of stimulus and response process, but through inherent "language acquisition device" which could help process language input. The language acquisition device, taking the original word heard as materials, through a complicated psychological process, constitutes the grammar of target language. Then according to the rules of target grammar, it can generate an unlimited number of

sentences, including which children had never heard of. Relying on natural language acquisition device, children can say many sentences which they had never heard of and also could understand sentences which they had never heard of. Obviously, above all, children learn language through their own instinct.

At present, it is difficult for us to intervene the pre-school children's oral communicative learning as the intervention of learning in elementary and middle schools, and we won't have to deliberately use artificial intervention for preschool children. What we need to do is to carry on the verbal communication. Children's oral communication learning is generally conducted in natural (normal) state; completely rely on "self-taught". Thus, we can conclude that the pre-school children's learning of this kind should be more of an instinctive learning. In fact, for human language acquisition, how much manual intervention should we give, how to process manual intervention, and so on, cannot get scientifically powerful explanation.

3. ACCELERATION OF LEARNING

Pre-school children's brain development speed is the fastest in their whole life. Based on the information known in the previous researches, the brain weight of newborn baby is more or less 390 grams, about 25% of the adult human brain. The brain weight increases 1g in the first year, and at the age of 2 to 3, it develops to 900-1,100 grams in weight, equivalent to 75% of the adult brain weight. After the age of 6/7, the development of brain weight becomes slower. During this period, the rate of brain development is amazing. This helps pre-school children learn oral communication directly.

Children before the age of 1 say little of meaningful words. At the age of 1, they have an understanding about words and instructions, and they can make some fractional, slight expression. When they are 1 and a half, they can grasp dozens of words and their understandability strengthens. However, in this period, their language output is incomplete, always a single word. At the age of 2, their vocabulary can be added to several hundreds, and statement of double words is quite obvious. They prefer to communicate with other people, but need some gestures to help improve the complete expression. After the age of 2, their vocabulary increases at an extremely fast rate, and the ability to attract the communication of people around becomes stronger. Children, at the age of 4, whose language is close to adults, can naturally communicate with people around. In General, normal pre-school children's language ability and verbal ability is close to adults at the age of 5-7.

Statistics show that the number of everyday words for children aged 3 to 4 is 1,730, children aged 4 to 5 is 2,583, and children aged 5 to 6 are 3,562. It is can be

seen that the growth of the everyday words for children is quick and their oral communicative competence is getting better and better. The period that the pre-school children are in the golden period for oral communication learning. Children in this period have the best learning ability in oral communication. They are good at absorbing the oral words, and are able to communicate freely with the oral words that will be learned soon. Gradually, they can get along well with the people around and gain the stuff needed for their growth. The pre-school children acquire these results in only 5 to 6 years, thus make the base of the language learning in their future study.

There is a close relation between the accelerated learning speed of the pre-school children and their strong brain function for oral communicative learning. Children in this period, the neuro in cranial nerve which is for the speech function is sensitive to the oral signal outside. Thus, the ability of receiving the oral signal is strong and the ability of handling this information is strong as well. These make the speed of oral communication of pre-school children of the quickest in their life.

The cubs of the animals in the wild have to adjust themselves to the environment fast, or they are easily hit by the catastrophe. The speed of growth is the key to the survival. The ability of quickly obtaining the oral communicative competence is one of the needed abilities and it aims to gain the stuff which is wanted for survival.

4. LEARNING IN CONTEXT

Piaget's theory on Children Development deems that children develop through the interaction with the environment. Children also gain and enhance their oral communication abilities through interaction with the surrounding environment. Environment in this context includes both socio-cultural, natural environmental factors and linguistic, non-linguistic factors. It is systematical, spatial and integrated. Pre-school children, due to their physiological immaturity, are supposed to adapt to their living environment and maintain the basic skills to survive as soon as possible. In order to adapt to the environment sooner, it is necessary for them to interact with the surrounding environment actively, get the substances essential for survival in the interaction and so on. Thus pre-school children acquire their communicative competence, quickly adapt to the environment, and access to better living in the exchange of information of the environment. Pre-school children learn in such a context, using linguistic and non-linguistic information to develop their language and parole. Pre-school children learn Chinese in context, in which they are willing to speak, to read, to write, and so on. Restlessness is an obvious characteristic of these children. This feature is beneficial for their study of Chinese.

Pre-school children live in real social environments (compared with primary and secondary school students), constantly contact with the society and nature, and so maintain a close relationship with surroundings. The context like this provides wealthy of information to stimulate children's language output, which is fresh, vivid, authentic, and timely. The information gives children multi-sensory stimulation and enriches their variety of cognition. In such situations or contexts, the words children learn do not appear in single instrumental features, but accompanied by rich cultural scene information. For example, when a mother communicates with her children, her expressions are often accomplished together with a number of facial expressions, vivid gestures (such as touching, kissing, etc.) and so on. This will greatly help children learn oral communication. In such a context, the children learn oral communication naturally, accurately, and with no pressure and no psychological burdens. They relax themselves in such a context. Thus in certain process, language communication is easy to learn, easy to use and they can easily master the language and quickly understand most of the content (research shows that pre-school children at the time of admission have already mastered the entire contents of Chinese language learning at primary and secondary schools of 75%).

In such a context, the pre-school children learn Chinese without pressure which language learning at primary and secondary levels suffers and without any interference from the outside world (for example, no curriculum requirements, no bounding of teaching objectives, and so on). However, children can also learn well in oral communication, and what they learn is already sufficient for normal communication in daily life. This is what we should think deeply about in Chinese teaching and learning in the primary and secondary school.

5. STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

The so-called learner-centeredness refers to that the learning process of learners is an active learning process, and also learners are self-satisfied with their choices and conscious and willing to learn. The degree of excellence in learning is often proportional to the degree of students' subjectivity, that is, the higher the degree of students' subjectivity, the higher the level of excellence, whereas is low. This is fully reflected in many excellent students. Good students are always active, but most bad students are always in passive learning.

Pre-school children's learning dominance is fully respected in their Chinese learning because adults are always taking very good care of them in all aspects of life. The kids' needs would be considered to the fullest and adults arrange the teaching schedule according to the kids' willingness and learning situation. As a result, the kids

are happy and eager to learn without pressure, and high-efficiency learning is achieved in such relaxing and easy Chinese learning environment. Rethink Chinese learning in our school, the students' subjectivity is deprived to a large extent and they don't like the learning materials and learning methods, which lead to their lack of interest. Passive learning and non subjectivity are an essential problem in our Chinese learning if it can be solved effectively, the students' learning level will be improved a lot.

The characteristics of these aspects in Chinese learning for pre-school children are what we should grasp when we help pre-school children's learning of Chinese. Accordingly, we will briefly talk about how to conduct Chinese language education for pre-school children. Chinese learning is mainly divided into oral communicative learning and the learning of reading and writing. We generally attach more importance to the learning of reading and writing, but the emphasis in each stage of Chinese learning of pre-school students should not be all the same. Pre-school children, because of their physiological immaturity (mainly because of their immaturity of brain, imperfection of brain nerve function, and incapability to complete advanced Chinese learning – the learning of reading and writing associated with written forms of Chinese), are mainly involved in oral communicative learning in this stage. While in the older stages (4-7 years old) they can learn the written forms, but generally this is not advocated, as some studies suggest that it may be harmful for pre-school children to learn the written form, for the normal development of the brain may be disadvantaged. In any case, it is beyond question that there will be bad influence for most of the children if we put ahead the learning content which is generally taught in elementary and middle schools to pre-school children. In recent years, the act that some children schools (kindergarten) force children to learn the content which should be included in primary school Chinese curriculum without authorization was prohibited by official order of the department of education. This is actually right. The parents of pre-school children cannot force children to learn the content which they should learn after entering school just because of the eager psychological desire of hoping their children to have a bright future. The consequences can only be counterproductive if we try to help shoots grow by pulling them upward. The oral communicative learning for pre-school children does not need to proceed deliberately, because as long as the children are healthy, they can autonomously learn oral communication on their own. However, as educators, we must note that pre-school children must be placed in the oral communication context frequently, with plenty of information in oral communication to stimulate their neural functions of language in the brain, to impel the normal development

of their language nerve. The reasons why “Wolf child” in the past was unable to conduct normal oral communication activities lie in its long-term separation from the communicative environment, which leads to the atrophy of congenital neural language function in the brain and even damage. This is worth attracting more of our attention. The constraints on pre-school children should not be too much, and we should let them learn oral communication freely with the guarantee of their safety and health. Such kind of learning must be combined with their actual daily life. It should proceed in their play and in the games with others (can be adult or children in the same age, and so on). In this process, they listen and speak happily, to express their happiness, anger, sorrow and amusement freely, and they are carefree to say what they want to say. They have interactive oral communication in the constant exchange and communication with others and constantly reach smooth oral communication. The oral communicative learning of pre-school children typically begins with the learning of the native language. Their mother tongue learning can easily reach the level of smoothly communicating with those people around in daily life in the early time of pre-school stage. But if adults constraint too much of children's oral communication learning, making them dare not to or rarely conduct oral communication, the stuttering will easily occur, and this can even affect their normal communicative behavior in the future. We should pay special attention to certain phenomenon. Pre-school children have many problems, and in the process of exploring the world, they may do many things that we adults have difficulty in understanding. We should tolerate them as much as possible, rather than attacking them. The communicative learning for pre-school children is very important. It affects their intellectual development, and has great influence on the Chinese learning after their entrance of school. So we should pay great attention to their oral communication learning. Our nursery school should let nature take its course, comply with the children's nature in the teaching process, give children as much freedom as possible (mostly free activities), and make every efforts to create an authentic communicative environment for children, so that they can learn communicative competence happily in exchange with others.

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