LEARNING STYLES: LEFT- AND RIGHT-BRAIN FUNCTIONING.

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Abstract:

Theories of learning, Gagne's "types" of learning, transfer processes, and aptitude and intelligence models are all attempts to describe universal human traits in learning. They seek to explain globally how people perceive, filter, store, and recall information. Such processes, the unifying theme of the previous chapter, do not account for the plethora of differences across individuals in the way they learn, or for differences within any one individual. While we all exhibit inherently human traits of learning, every individual approaches a problem or learns a set of facts or organizes a combination of feelings from a unique perspective. This chapter deals with cognitive variations in learning a second language: variations in learning **styles** that differ across individuals, and in strategies employed by individuals to attack particular problems in particular contexts.

Key words: tolerant of ambiguity, reflective, field independent, corpus collosum, field independent, imaginable sensory, communicative, cultural, affective, cognitive, and intellectual factor.

СТИЛИ ОБУЧЕНИЯ: ФУНКЦИОНИРОВАНИЕ ЛЕВОГО И ПРАВОВОГО МОЗГА.

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Аннотация:

Теории обучения, «типы» обучения Гане, процессы передачи, модели способностей и интеллекта - все это попытки описать универсальные человеческие качества в обучении. Они стремятся глобально объяснить, как

люди воспринимают, фильтруют, хранят и запоминают информацию. Такие процессы, объединяющая тема предыдущей главы, не учитывают множество различий между людьми в том, как они учатся, или различий между людьми. Хотя все мы проявляем человеческие черты обучения, каждый человек подходит к проблеме, изучает ряд фактов или организует комбинацию чувств с уникальной точки зрения. В этой главе рассматриваются когнитивные различия в изучении второго языка: различия в стилях обучения, которые различаются у разных людей, и стратегии, используемые людьми для решения конкретных проблем в определенных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: толерантность к неоднозначности, рефлексивный, независимый от поля, независимый от поля, мыслимый сенсорный, коммуникативный, культурный, аффективный, когнитивный и интеллектуальный факторы.

Before we look specifically at some styles and strategies of second language learning, a few words are in order to explain the differences among process, style, and strategy as the terms are used in the literature on second language acquisition. Historically, there has been some confusion in the use of these three terms, and so it is important to carefully define them at the outset.

Style is a term that refers to consistent and rather enduring tendencies or preferences within an individual. Styles are those general characteristics of intellectual functioning (and personality type, as well) that pertain to you as an individual, and that differentiate you from someone else. For example, you might be more visually oriented, more tolerant of ambiguity, or more reflective than someone else—these would be styles that characterize a general pattern in your thinking or feeling.

Suppose you are visiting a foreign country whose language you don't speak or read. You have landed at the airport and your contact person, whose name you don't know, is not there to meet you. To top it off, your luggage is missing. It's 3:00 A.M. and no

one in the sparsely staffed airport speaks English. What should you do? There is obviously no single solution to this multifaceted problem. Your solution will be based to a great extent on the *styles* you happen to bring to bear. For example, if you are *tolerant of ambiguity*, you will not easily get flustered by your unfortunate circumstances. If you are *reflective*, you will exercise patience and not jump quickly to a conclusion about how to approach the situation. If you are *field independent*, you will focus on the necessary and relevant details and not be distracted by surrounding but irrelevant details.

The way we learn things in general and the way we attack a problem seem to hinge on a rather amorphous link between personality and cognition; this link is referred to as cognitive style. When cognitive styles are specifically related to an educational context, where affective and physiological factors are intermingled, they are usually more generally referred to as learning styles.

Learning styles might be thought of as "cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment". Or, more simply, as "a general predisposition, voluntary or not, toward processing information in a particular way". In the enormous task of learning a second language, one that so deeply involves affective factors, a study of learning style brings important variables to the forefront. Such styles can contribute significantly to the construction of a unified theory of second language acquisition.

Learning styles mediate between emotion and cognition, as you will soon discover. For example, a reflective style invariably grows out of a reflective personality or a reflective mood. An impulsive style, on the other hand, usually arises out of an impulsive emotional state. People's styles are determined by the way they internalize their total environment, and since that internalization process is not strictly cognitive, we find that physical, affective, and cognitive domains merge in learning styles. Some would claim that styles are stable traits in adults. This is a questionable view. It would appear that individuals show general tendencies toward

one style or another, but that differing contexts will evoke differing styles in the same individual. Perhaps an "intelligent" and "successful" person is one who is "bicognitive"—one who can manipulate both ends of a style continuum.

Conclusion:

If I were to try to enumerate all the learning styles that educators and psychologists have identified, a very long list would emerge. From early research by Ausubel (1968:171) and Hill (1972), to recent research by Reid (1995), Ehrman (1996), and Cohen (1998), literally dozens of different styles have been identified. These include just about every imaginable sensory, communicative, cultural, affective, cognitive, and intellectual factor. A select few of those styles have emerged in second language research as potentially significant contributors to successful acquisition. These will be discussed in the next sections.

We have already observed in this article that left- and right-brain dominance is a potentially significant issue in developing a theory of second language acquisition. As the child's brain matures, various functions become *lateralized* to the left or right hemisphere. The left hemisphere is associated with logical, analytical thought, with mathematical and linear processing of information. The right hemisphere perceives and remembers visual, tactile, and auditory images; it is more efficient in processing holistic, integrative, and emotional information. Torrance (1980) lists several characteristics of left and right-brain dominance.

While we can cite many differences between left- and right-brain characteristics, it is important to remember that the left and right hemispheres operate together as a "team." Through the *corpus collosum*, messages are sent back and forth so that both hemispheres are involved in most of the neurological activity of the human brain. Most problem solving involves the capacities of both hemispheres, and often the best solutions to problems are those in which each hemisphere has participated optimally. We must also remember Scovel's (1982)

warning that left-and right- brain differences tend to draw more attention than the research warrants at the present time.

Nevertheless, the left-/right-brain construct helps to define another useful learning style continuum, with implications for second language learning and teaching. Danesi (1988), for example, used "neurological bimodality" to analyze the way in which various language teaching methods have failed: by appealing too strongly to left-brain processes, past methods were inadequately stimulating important right-brain processes in the language classroom. Krashen, Seliger, and Hartnett (1974) found support for the hypothesis that left-brain-dominant second language learners preferred a deductive style of teaching, while right-brain-dominant learners appeared to be more successful in an inductive classroom environment. Stevick (1982) concluded that left-brain-dominant second language learners are better at producing separate words, gathering the specifics of language, carrying out sequences of operations, and dealing with abstraction, classification, labeling, and reorganization. Right-brain-dominant learners, on the other hand, appear to deal better with whole images (not with reshuffling parts), with generalizations, with metaphors, and with emotional reactions and artistic expressions. In this article I noted the role of the right hemisphere in second language learning. This may suggest a greater need to perceive whole meanings in those early stages, and to analyze and monitor oneself more in the later stages.

Left- and right-brain characteristics

Left-Brain Dominance	**Right-Brain Dominance**
➢ Intellectual ➢ Remembers names ➢ Responds to verbal instructions and explanations ➢ Experiments systematically and	➢ Intuitive ➢ Remembers faces ➢ Responds to demonstrated, illustrated, or symbolic instructions

with control ➢ Makes objective judgments ➢ Planned and structured ➢ Prefers established, certain information ➢ Analytic reader ➢ Reliance on language in thinking and remembering ➢ Prefers talking and writing ➢ Prefers multiple-choice tests ➢ Controls feelings ➢ Not good at interpreting body language ➢ Rarely uses metaphors ➢ Favors logical problem solving	➢ Experiments randomly and with less restraint ➢ Makes subjective judgments ➢ Fluid and spontaneous ➢ Prefers elusive, uncertain information ➢ Synthesizing reader ➢ Reliance on images in thinking and remembering Prefers drawing and manipulating objects ➢ Prefers open-ended questions ➢ More free with feelings ➢ Good at interpreting body language ➢ Frequently uses metaphors ➢ Favors intuitive problem solving

You may be asking yourself how left- and right-brain functioning differs from FI and FD. While few studies have set out explicitly to correlate the two factors, intuitive observation of learners and conclusions from studies of both hemispheric preference and FI show a strong relationship. Thus, in dealing with either type of cognitive style, we are dealing with two styles that are highly parallel. Conclusions that were drawn above for FI and FD generally apply well for left- and right-brain functioning, respectively.

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