

Implications of Cognitive Developmental Theories for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Alma Žero

University of Sarajevo / Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Key words: EFL, cognitive theories, language acquisition, teaching

ABSTRACT

One of the most fascinating aspects of human development is language acquisition and it has attracted the attention of linguists and psychologists for generations. Researchers all over the world discuss the particular developmental sequences and describe what it is that learners actually learn throughout their language development.

In this paper, we attempt to focus on how this outstanding development takes place and what the implications are for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), especially to younger and adolescent learners. We explore the role and importance of well-known language theories, including Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Skinner; and we transfer their ideas to the EFL classroom. Furthermore, we conducted a research comprised of questionnaires and observations of classes in NGO Creativus and elementary school Izet Šabić in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, so as to gain insight in particular theoretical uses when working with the mentioned ELL groups. The results show that the most appealing theory for teachers of younger language learners are Bruner's scaffolding and Skinner's behaviorism, as well as that teachers do try to incorporate theories in their everyday practice and that every one of the theories offers plenty of possibilities and suggestions for teaching EFL.

Classroom activities and teacher decisions can create, or limit, the learners' opportunities for learning EFL. For that reason, we aim and hope to help teachers make their teaching more effective by attending to the mental world of the learner and by understanding how theory works in EFL practice.