The Influence of the Dominant Linguistic Paradigm on Language Teaching

1Elena Kolodkina and 2Paul Juinn Bing Tan

1Applied English Department, Southern Taiwan University of Technology.
2Department of Applied Foreign Languages, National Penghu University.

The terms ‘paradigm shift’ was first used by Kuhn in his 1962 book The Structure of Scientific Revolution to describe the process and result of a change in basic assumptions within the ruling theory of natural sciences. A scientific revolution occurs, according to Kuhn, when scientists encounter anomalies which cannot be explained by the universally accepted paradigm and the scientific discipline is thrown into a state of crisis. New ideas, perhaps ones previously discarded, are tried. An intellectual ‘battle’ takes place between the followers of the new paradigm and the hold-outs of the old paradigm. After a given discipline has changed from one paradigm to another, this is called, in Kuhn's terminology, a scientific revolution or a paradigm shift (1962). Kuhn's ideas were successfully applied to the description of historic development of linguistics. For example, Makayev[10] used the notion of paradigm in his analysis of the history of comparative linguistics. But most of modern researchers agree that the notion of a paradigm, and a paradigm shift elaborated by Kuhn for sciences, can’t be directly applied to humanities. According to Davidson[8], the notion that any languages or theories could be incommensurable with one another was itself incoherent. So, in humanities Kuhn's claims must be taken in a weaker sense than in sciences. A paradigm in humanities may combine the features of several scientific trends and is supposed to be the interconnection of different conceptual viewpoints.

Berezin[12] regards linguistics a polyparadigmatic science. A polyparadigmatic status of linguistics can be backed by the philosophic theory of synergetics, characterized by non-linear interpretation of the world, leading to the support of variability, alternative ways of development and rates of evolution[14]. Paradigms in modern linguistics interact; the results obtained in one paradigm can be used in other paradigms. According to Makarov[11], paradigm shift in linguistics doesn’t imply the direct change of paradigm, but is expressed in the transformation of scientific metaphors, linguistic views, new priorities, methods and perspectives. Modern scientists distinguish between different sets of paradigm in linguistics. Stepanov[13] writes about three major scientific paradigms, correlating with three main axes of language: semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic. Beaugrande[11] distinguishes between eight different trends, associated either with linguistic schools, such as descriptivism, logical linguistics, or with scientific branches, such as traditional grammar, philosophy. Susov[14] writes about four major linguistic paradigms, existing at the end of the 20th century: comparativism, structuralism, generativism, and functionalism. According to Kubryakova[15], the analysis of paradigms can be done with different degree of segmentation. One paradigm can be regarded both as a unity and as a complex structure, comprising different subparadigms. Describing the evolution of linguistics from the 17th up to the end of the 20th century, we’ll dwell on the generally recognized linguistic paradigms and trace how they affected methodology. Writing about the influence of modern linguistic paradigm on methodology of teaching, we’ll present our view on new forming linguistic paradigms.

In the present study we focus on how the dominant linguistic paradigm influences the evolution of the methodology of teaching of a foreign language and serves the guideline of its development. Linguistics studies the nature, structure, and variations of language. The method concept in language teaching is the notion of a systematic set of teaching or teaching practices based on particular theory of language and language learning. Language teaching is mainly backed by linguistics, its mother science. No wonder, that a ruling linguistic paradigm, guiding the development of linguistics in a certain period of its history, affects methodology of teaching of a foreign language. We’ll demonstrate how the change of the dominant linguistic paradigm leads to the evolution of the methods of language teaching.

In the 17th-18th centuries grammar dominated in linguistics. Philosophy of language tried to find correlations between forms of human thinking and grammar of classical languages. The attempts of scientists to create the ‘universal grammar’ regarded as the basis of all languages led to the introduction of grammar-translation method of language teaching. The grammar-translation method was widely used in teaching the classics, namely Latin, and it was
transferred to the teaching of modern languages when they were introduced into schools, first as an optional and then as a compulsory subject. In teaching a foreign language by means of the grammar-translation method primary attention was paid to the assimilation of grammar rules of the foreign language that pupils studied. The vocabulary was ‘tuned up’ to grammar. Translation was extensively utilized both as a means of explanation of new words, grammar forms, and structures, and as a means of mastering the foreign language; all exercises for assimilating the language material were based on translation from the mother-tongue into the foreign language and from the foreign language into the mother tongue.

The 19th century was the age of comparative studies. Comparative method set a goal to reconstruct the parent language through the comparison of live languages, primarily their lexical and phonetic systems. As a result, diversity and uniqueness of languages were recognized. Educationalists turned to the colloquial speech, the result being the introduction of direct method. The method was called direct because in teaching a foreign language an attempt was made to establish a direct connection between a foreign word and the thing or notion it denotes without the aid of the native language. Spoken language became the basis of teaching. Contrary to grammar-translation method, the restricted application or very often complete elimination of translation as a means of teaching a language was the characteristic feature of direct method.

In 1915 Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* was published, where he focused not on the use of language (parole, or talk), but rather on the underlying system of language (langue) and called his theory semiotics (1915/1959). This approach focused on examining how the elements of language related to each other in the present, that is, 'synchronically' rather than 'diachronically'. Saussure’s *Course* influenced many linguists in the period between WWI and WWII. Numerous schools of structuralism disputed about some significant issues of language exploration, but united on one and the same basis of common structural platform, defining the development of linguistics in the 20th century. Following Saussure, the majority of scientists used the term ‘language system’ as a synonym of the term ‘language’, stressing the system character of language. A language system was seen as a totality of separate elements, existing only in combination with other elements, thus giving the integrity to the whole system. Different levels of language were studied separately. Methodology accepted the level model of teaching, duplicating the concept and structure of a language model, where the structure-system elements dominated. Thus, up to the 60’s of the 20th century the impact in language teaching was made on the comprehension of the so-called language material.

Since the 60’s of the 20th century linguistics combined studies of a language system with studies of speech. Speech was regarded as a realization of a language system in acts of communication. Linguists strictly distinguished between language competence and usage of language. Methodology of teaching dealt not only with acquisition of language means and rules of their usage in speech, but also with their automatic application in acts of communication. Thus, the turn to teaching speech activity was made. The strategic idea of the communicative method is the idea of communication. This method, widely used in different interpretations, is regarded as a basic method of teaching speaking skills. It is important that teaching communicative skills is not only the declared practical speech goal, but also the way to this goal through the practical usage of language. The communicativeness as a category of methodology may be regarded as a basis for the creation of the methods of teaching other skills) listening, reading, writing, and even translation.

Since the 80-s the so-called anthropocentric paradigm with its interest to a human factor in the language dominates humanities and linguistics, in particular. We think that it is possible to distinguish between two tendencies in broad anthropocentric paradigm: cognitive and linguacultural.

Cognitive linguistic subparadigm, being a part of an interdisciplinary broad cognitive approach, studies language as a cognitive mechanism, characteristic of a human. The process of the second language acquisition is regarded as active and creative. It is a springboard, allowing to overcome invisible barriers, which quite often arise between people, speaking and thinking in different languages. Scientists study not only language, but also a human being, using a language. The category of a language personality appears and gradually becomes the basic one in linguistics. According to Karaulov, a language personality is a sum of abilities and characteristics of a person, determining the creation and comprehension of speech products, which differ in: (1) the degree of the structure of their language; (2) the profundity and the accuracy of the reflection of the reality; (3) the definite purpose (2004: 216). Following linguistics, methodology of teaching turns to the regularities of learning in a broad sense of this word and tries to create a working model of a second language personality. Such model can be regarded as a complex of a person’s abilities to communicate in a foreign language on the cross-cultural level in order to achieve an adequate interaction with representatives of a foreign culture.

The discrepancy of associative pictures of the world in
various languages, investigated in psycholinguistics, made scientists introduce the concept of ‘a language personality’, applied to the Russian language\(^{(5)}\). According to this concept, a language personality has a three-level structure with verbal-semantic, languacognitive and pragmatic levels. The first level is characterized by readiness for nomination, based on associations of a word with an object. The second level reflects readiness of a language personality to perform different types of mental and speech activities and to adopt different communicative roles. The third, the upper level, gives the opportunity to realize oneself in various kinds of activities according to communicative needs of a person. Communicative-cognitive method of teaching is based on the assumption that language ‘is built’ on the basis of individual cognitive activity in the process of communicative practice. Giving a new cognitive perspective to communicative practice, cognitive paradigm can give a new impact to communicative method of teaching.

We think that a new languacultural subparadigm is being created now. In many aspects cultural approach guides the development both of modern linguistics and methodology of teaching. The latter has to accept that alongside with formation of creative skills in various kinds of speech activity and mastering of a linguistic code, it is necessary to present elements of national culture, traditions and customs, social system of values of the country, which language is being studied, in order to overcome national stereotypes and create readiness to sociocultural dialogue and compromise. Thus, one of the principles of modern pedagogical systems can be formulated as creation of interpersonal sociocultural educational environment. Linguists regard a cultural concept as a basic element of culture, its concentrated product\(^{(12,15)}\). Special attention is given to the so called languacultural dominants\(^{(12)}\) the system of special concepts, revealing the priorities of the given culture. Cultural approach in language teaching should be based on the interdisciplinary integrated language education with compulsory regard for the sociocultural environment of teaching and learning a language. But as culture is mostly presented in texts, it is very important to revise the contents of the language teaching, to make a new typology of texts of different functional styles for all levels of education in order to create the so-called ‘image of the world’ of the language speakers. Texts, which are most often referred to as especially meaningful for a particular culture, are called precedential texts in Russian linguistics. Gudkov\(^{(5)}\) defines a precedential text as a ready and all-sufficient product of mental and speech activity, a polypredicative unit; a complex sign, the sum of the components of which is not equal to its meaning. Being a part of a cognitive basis, a precedential text is well known to all average members of a languacultural community and is often referred to through symbols and utterances, connected with this text. According to Karaulov\(^{(7)}\), precedential texts are important for a language personality in cognitive and emotive aspect; have a super personal nature, as well known to the broad environment of the given language personality, including ancestors and contemporaries. Languacultural dominants and precedential texts should be of the primary interest of methodology of teaching. But the immediate aim of both languacultural and communicative-cognitive methods is to form a second language personality in an appropriate cultural environment.

**REFERENCES**


