

A Study of the Influence of Gender Differences on English Learning of Senior High School Students

WANG Qian^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

In recent years, people from all walks of life have paid more and more attention to gender differences. Under the background of new curriculum reform, the attention to students' individual differences becomes one of the most important subjects of education theory and practice, and the gender differences are the necessary link. This thesis is based on the education of senior high school English teaching, starts with the point of "the gender difference is that the differences male and female students showed in the learning activity", and puts forward countermeasures for difference teaching, from the aspects of gender differences in English learning in a variety of performances, such as in English learning style, learning memory, learning motivation and the concept of gender differences and in the selection and use of learning strategy. The paper is for the purpose of clearing up the gender difference's negative impact on foreign language learning and improving senior high students' English education to a certain extent.

Key words: Gender differences; English learning; English teaching; Senior high school students

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INTRODUCTION

The research of gender differences originated in the west, so the foreign writings on the gender difference

are countless. Gender difference is one of the research contents of differential psychology, with a history of nearly hundred years since the journal of W.Stern *Differential Psychology* published in Germany in 1911. In the 1920s, the relationship between gender differences and language learning captured the eyes of anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists, and on which they did a lot of researches. Namely, the famous American psychologist E.L.Thordike showed that women are better than men in terms of language expression and short-term memory with her experiments, and the intuition, space analysis of comprehensive ability, and experimental observation, reasoning and historical knowledge of men are better than women.

And in the 20th century, the professor of Stanford University E.E.M accoby and C.C.Jacklin quoted in *The Gender Differences in Psychology* that "the main factor that boys and girls have obvious gender difference is that girls have better language ability" (Jacklin, 1974). Burstall found that girls more scattered in all language testing than boys, during his tracking study to 6,000 French children in 1975 (Burstall, 1975). In 1987, Boyle did a survey to 490 Hong Kong students (one girl 233, boy 233) about their English learning, and then he found the girl's English proficiency test scores were significantly higher than boys in nearly ten times. American linguist Ellis explicitly mentioned in his book *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* that there exists differences of language learners in language learning, such as gender differences, age differences, cognitive differences, personality differences, learning motivation and learning strategy difference, etc. (Ellis, 1994). And in the study of gender differences, most researchers agree that women are superior to men in learning a foreign language (Li, 2005).

All these findings suggest that the gender difference existed objectively, and in terms of learning a second language, girls have obvious advantages than boys.

1. PROBLEMS IDENTIFICATION

Most studies show that male and female students were of no significant difference in IQ, but they have a certain gender difference on the intelligence quality and type, such as in memory, attention, and the quality of thinking. And in today's foreign language teaching, we are more focusing on the image thinking, emphasizing the interaction between teachers and students, which desperately needs wide knowledge and large amount of memory. Thus, it is not surprising that girls are better than boys in the early stages of the language learning (Ye, 1985). And factors of gender differences will be discussed in the following aspects.

1.1 Gender Differences in Physical and Environmental Factors

1.1.1 Physical Factors

Psychology studies have shown that the partial side of the two brain hemispheres of men and women is quite different in the development speed and level of specialization. Women's left hemisphere on sexual partial side of sexual function is earlier and stronger than men, so they are better than men in terms of language expression and short-term memory. Men, on the other hand, develop the right hemisphere, so they are better than women in spatial perception, analysis, comprehensive ability and experimental observation.

Biologically speaking, women's sound and pronunciation organs developed much earlier than men, so the female student is good at verbal, hearing and expression and their verbal expression ability and auditory perception are stronger than boys. Women's hearing for the dominant language is usually sensitive consciousness so that their English grades generally better than men's.

What's more, girls have the advantage of intelligence, which indicates girls have reason to get higher scores in English than boys. If, on the other hand, on the basis of equal quality state and the same teaching guide, it is normal girls' scores are even not as good as boys.

From theory to experience, all researches show that female students' memory is significantly better than that of male students in foreign language learning (including understanding, mechanical memory, short-term memory and long-term memory). And girls' memory activities are also far stronger than boys'. In a word, foreign language learning is a memory (Jia, 1996).

If you want to learn English well, you need a large number of memory activities. We teachers should especially seize this strong point of the girl in the teaching of a large number of the reasonable vocabulary tests, text writing, dialogues, story shows, retelling, and dictation training and so on. And let them accumulate abundant English language materials, in order to lay a solid foundation to improve all aspects of the English language learning abilities.

1.1.2 Education and Environmental Factors

Feng Zhongliang points out that the individual style of thinking is developed with age in *the education psychology*, "according to the research of Chong Delin, preschool age is mainly intuitive thinking action, elementary school period is mainly image abstract thinking, junior high school period is the main experience on abstract logical thinking, and the senior high school period is main theoretical model on abstract logic thinking" (Feng, 1997).

Senior high school students are in the last two periods, and their abstract logical thinking should be the in a proper level. Until now, however, people often think that abstract logical thinking of girls is less than that of boys, because that female suffers family, social and gender discrimination in school education. However, there is no scientific basis in second language acquisition. In fact, numerous examples show that the girls' abstract logical thinking is not inferior to that of boys, and their ability of thinking in images is better than boys.

On second language acquisition-English language learning, students should not only need a better image thinking, but also need to have a good abstract logical thinking ability, especially in grammar learning and reading comprehension. And girls just have these two styles of thinking. So it is so natural that the girl's has better English scores than boys.

1.2 Gender Differences in IQ

It is well known that intelligence is not a kind of single ability but the combination of attention, observation, memory, thinking ability. And of these factors, different gender students show their different characteristics, so we teachers should make the student's show their distinct gender characteristics through learning activities. And it has a great influence on acquisition of language (especially English). These differences mainly display in the following aspects: perceptions and memory in gender difference.

First, Feeling and perception are the beginning of all human activities and also the foundation of knowledge. According to the research at home and abroad, the perspective of male is more sensitive than that of women, while the hearing, smell, pain and tactile sensations of women are significantly higher than that of male, especially the fingertip tactile sensitivity, which makes women more outstanding than men in the field of fine operating activities. As a result of these differences, there are obvious difference in perception between men and women. American psychologist Michael Bryant concluded that the male is given priority to visual perception and spatial perception (including the other party and the graph of observation), and women take advantage in the auditory perception of voice recognition and positioning (especially discern pitch). So girls English listening comprehension ability is better than boys.

Second, according to the contents of memory, it is usually divided into image memory, mood memory, logical memory, and motion memory. Male and female students are significantly different in the contents of memory. Boys are good at logic memory, while girls are good at image, emotion, and motion memory. And it is surprising that girls can arouse some exciting and painful memory materials according to a certain kind of representation or emotion. In the nature of the contents to memory, boys attach great importance to the understanding from the point, and they pay more attention to the memory of materials with the objective reality and experience of contact, analyzing the inner relation between memory materials. While girls focus on mechanical memory, and their foreign language word memory ability is generally higher than boys.

Memory is the most important factors affecting language learning. Second language acquisition has a very close relationship with memory; we can say that where there is memory, there is rich knowledge. Good memory will help second language learners to learn a second language as soon as possible. "Memory is very important in foreign language teaching and learning, and even a foreign language learning program is a memory." (Hu, 1996)

1.3 Gender Differences in Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are ways for learners to store and process information. According to the information processing theory, the linguist Mott divided strategies into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies (O'McIlley, 1990). With the right strategy, learners can correct incorrect learning behaviors in second language acquisition at any time, making more self learning guidance, and higher efficiency. According to our daily teaching observation, it can be easily found that girls' English strategy is more conscious than that of boys. Their learning strategies include the plan and the reflection.

2. SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR TEACHING

According to what has mentioned above, we can obviously come to the idea that our teachers should teach on the basis of the gender difference in second language teaching.

For girl students, what we should pay more attention are:

Firstly, teachers should exert the advantage of their sensitive perception, and make full use of teaching material of perceptual knowledge teaching. And girls are more likely to understand the visual language described, and reproduce or reorganization the representation of memories to establish a new image. So we should advocate their advantages to make them learn well in second language acquisition.

Secondly, to consolidate knowledge through memory, teachers should actively guide the girl to use of image, mood, memory, motor memory and mechanical memory which are better than that of boys, and improve their memory and grade of learning English through a variety of ways.

Thirdly, we should guide them to understand how to make a summary about a series of perceptual experience and learning materials consciously, letting them gradually reveal the essential feature of the general things so as to improve the generalization ability and the level of abstract thinking, thus improving the overall performance of learning English.

For boys, more attention should be paid in the following aspects:

Firstly, teachers should lead them to give full play to get used to the strong points of abstract thinking and summary ability, and fully grasp the rational knowledge of the teaching material. Therefore, they can use this advantages to make them get a good mark in English study, especially in the case of gestalt fills up and reading comprehension.

Secondly, we should guide them to make full use of their logical and understanding memory advantage to improve the effect of memory. For example, we can use associative memory and understanding memory to improve their efficiency of memory, so as to improve the efficiency of their memorizing words.

Thirdly, guiding them to process perceptual materials consciously, and reinforce the trainings of their image thinking in learning a second language. They can quickly set up a new image of things, and improve their powers of observation, the development level of intuitive feeling, perception, so as to make them in some need to think in images in English learning and get good grades.

Fourthly, leading them to talk with girls as much as possible to increase the language sense and language ability, and actively guiding them to read English articles at the same time to expand their aspect of knowledge, and strengthen the guidance of writing and improve overall performance.

Anyhow, gender differences among senior high school students make their learning activities with different gender color and the irrational self attribution. As teachers, we should be not only have the ability to guide students to give full play to their own gender advantages, but also let male and female students learn and make complements from each other in the cooperative learning, constantly getting learning progress.

CONCLUSION

Through comparison and analysis of the factors influencing male and female students in senior high school

of the second language acquisition, it can be known that male and female students are different in second language acquisition.

Therefore, the difference between the male and female students in second language, especially in English learning should attract the attention of students and teachers. We educators should admit this kind of difference, attach importance to this difference according to gender difference, learn their respective advantages of the concept on teaching of gender difference, and improve the efficiency of English teaching and learning.

As education workers, we should teach according to the characteristics of the male and female students and the teaching material arrangement. And we should not only understand the discrepancies between male and female students mentally, correcting the traditional negative gender bias and gender concepts, more should be done according to the difference of teaching, and at the same time, but also play the respective advantages of the male and female students according to the difference of teaching to help them avoid short points.

So it is advocated to cooperative learning, especially the cooperative learning group of boys and girls in language teaching in senior high schools.

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