Theoretical Perspective of ELT Language Learning and Acquisition

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Abstract

Among the language skills, the first skill a child acquires in his or her mother tongue is the ability to understand the spoken words, i.e., the skill of listening. Then he / she tries to reproduce the sound sequences heard from others to express his / her desires, aspirations and needs, and thereby acquire the skill of speaking. Similarly reading and writing skills are also acquired gradually. This paper deals with Language Learning and Acquisition.

Keywords: Human Communication Theory, Instinctive Learning, Learning Theories, Learning Environment

1. Introduction

The oracy skill of a language is generally acquired in an informal way in the social setting in which it is used (socialization). This is because the children are placed in a position which obligatorily requires a mode of communication for many reasons, to acquire the oracy. That is, the demand of communication channel compels them to acquire oracy. In some contexts, especially in the case of second language, oracy is learned or taught through the structured means. But the skills of literacy (whether mother tongue literacy or other tongues literacy) are being learned or taught through the formal system. Generally man learns four linguistic skill of his mother tongue one after another and also simultaneously to certain extent. Literacy cannot be acquired through other than the structured means whereas oracy can be acquired either informally or informally.

2. Differences between Acquiring and Learning

There are diverse perspectives related to acquiring and learning of language. One acquires a language through experience which happens unintentionally and casually whereas the learning of language involves a conscious involvement in trying to master it. The acquisition of language occurs through outside world contact in normal situations which stands in contrast to attentive and mindful concentration in learning a language in classrooms. The language capacity of the learners differs based on the way of acquisition. The functional exposure strengthens the communicative skill but not the grammatical knowledge, while the methodically trained learners score well in grammatical competency and lack in communicative aptitude.

3. Process involved in Acquiring first Language

The acquisition process of language has two different approaches. The learner gets exposure to the first language at an early age when he/she does not establish verbal communication, but learns it by imitation. The numerous stages involved in language acquisition take place subliminaly in his/her social connection. The stages include pre-linguistic stage, single word stage, early multi-word stage, and later multi-word stage. When the learner reaches the last stage, he/she gains linguistic competency in constructing numerous sentences.

4. Instinctive Learning Vs Mentored Learning

The second language learnt in a spontaneous and casual method from the common everyday situations in life paves way for an instinctive grasping of language. In a classroom set up, the learner intentionally receives guidance and systematic direction from his/her mentor to learn the second language, and this is referred to as guided learning. Hence, the process of picking up a second language happens in both the ways, naturally and instructively. The earlier one is nothing but learning through correspondence in societal communication. The next incorporates a methodical teaching and learning process using various books, audio visual aids, activities, practices etc.,.

5. Language and Linguistics

Language, the most remarkable achievement of mankind, in one way other is omnipresent and part of every one's life. Every language is unique in its constitution which has to be internalized for an effective communication. There is always an air of enigma surmounting the distinctiveness of a language. Language is a result of the blending of set of smallest units of speech, the phonemes. "All communication involves faith; indeed, some linguisticians hold that the potential obstacles to the acts of verbal understanding are so many and diverse that it is a mirror miracle that they take place at all." [1] Language is an essential part of social mores and reflects an educated behaviour. It fails to function in blankness and forms an integral part of civilization. Linguistics is structural because importance is laid ahead the contrasts amongst units and parts of units. Conventionally, the central part of the discipline of linguistics includes the universal theories about language, the techniques and the concepts related to a portrayal of the structures of a language.

6. Language Learning

The term 'Learning' has two shades of meaning viz.,
i. Learning is a process of change in knowledge and behavior and
ii. Learning is a process of memorizing or learning by heart.

It is to be mentioned that all changes taking place in an individual do not lead to learning. The changes brought about by aging or other physical processes can hardly be described as learning changes, though they may necessitate learning changes.

Learning as change takes into it two main forms, viz.,

i. Those automatic responses to new information, perception or activities that result in change. This is known as incidental learning and
ii. Those structured and purposeful changes aimed at achieving mastery.

Learning the language implies the everlasting changes brought about willingly in one's pattern of acting, thinking and feeling.

The main aim of education is to enhance the ability and capability of the learners in handling the situations based on the changes that happen in the ever dynamic scenario. Right from the stage of school education, a perfect atmosphere to promote language acquisition has to be created. The pedagogic methods charted have to facilitate the learner to involve actively in ways to strengthen his/her language proficiency without the supervision of a teacher. The training for self learning and stimulation of curiosity to learn will make a learner more accountable in acquiring language skills.

7. Need for Learner Training

The techniques and procedures help the learner to evolve into effectual communicators, and that is the fruitful outcome of learner training. In language learning, there is many to observe and learn. In reality, in most of the fields, learner undergoes a prolonged learning in his subject even after the completion of his/her course. This happens in certain practical oriented matters like cookery, gardening, sewing, motor vehicle upkeep etc, but related to learning verbal communication it is true that only a handful is engaged in learning even after the formal period of studies. The combination of structures and rules in a language makes acquiring it a complex process. Even an intellectual individual who masters anything by understanding and regular rehearsal, finds it tough when it comes to learning a language. Consequently, the learner has to put in committed efforts to comprehend the various facets of a language and practice with steadfast focus.

8. Attributes of a Language Learner

The following are the characteristics of good language learners. They are

Finding a suitable and new way of learning
- Trying to understand the function of language
- Creating and experimenting using language
- Learning from the mistakes

- Using the familiarity in the first language to learn the second language
- Learning the spoken and written styles based on the usage in different circumstances

9. Learning Theories

Learning theories are of the following types:

9.1 Behavioral Theories

These theories suggest that one learns by receiving stimulus from his environment. The teacher may direct this process by selecting the stimuli and by reinforcing the approved responses, while discouraging the wrong responses. Learning is brought about by the association between the response and reinforcement.

9.2 Cognitive Theories

These theories point out the active engagement of the mind in relation to matter and consideration. In this type of theory, importance is given to the process involved in creative responses and to the organization of perception that goes on in the mind.

9.3 Humanist Theories

These learning theories are more recent in origin and are not as coherent as those found in the other two theories. In these, importance is also given to the active nature of the learners. Indeed the learners' actions largely create the learning situation.

10. Learning Environment

No man or woman is an island. The learning process calls upon the resources of the environment in which the learner is situated. Human communication theory indicates that communication links people together into an organization, to achieve a common purpose/goal. It tends towards the external end of the personality scale. Social learning theory stresses the internal factors. This is not so in the case of human communication theories. It indeed stresses the active engagement of an individual with the environment. There are three domains of learning.

10.1 Technical Learning

It includes three aspects viz.
- How to manipulate the environment
- The acquisition of the skill and
- Understanding the need to control the world one lives in.

10.2 Practical Learning

This is concerning with the learning changes in the realm of interpersonal relations and is concerned with increasing interpersonal understanding.

10.3 Emancipator Learning

This includes the process of self-understanding, and having an awareness and transformation of cultural and personal presuppositions that are always there with one, and effect the way he acts.

There are many other theories of learning and most of them rely upon some concept of stimulus-response. But recent works suggest that the individual is engaged in learning process of active use of language and relating it with some new form of knowledge or with the social environment and with himself. Learning takes place in a number of areas. All these theories have something to teach about what one is doing. Also, these theories contribute to develop such of those factors that are responsible for effective learning.

11. Factors Responsible for Effective Learning

There are several factors responsible for effective learning.

12. Motivation

It is concerned with the arousal of the learners to new levels of awareness and receptivity of stimuli.

13. Cue

This is concerned with the process of providing the stimulus.

14. Engagement

It deals with the process by which the learner relates the stimulus to previous learning or past experience.

15. Activity

The process by which the learners engage with stimulus to create the various responses.

16. Evaluation and Feedback

This consists of the process by which the learner judges from among the various possible responses.

17. Reinforcement

It deals with the reward or punishment for the various responses so that the right responses are selected out and encouraged and the wrong responses are discouraged.

Apart from these factors some theories have suggested several other factors also viz.,

- Devotion of materials into learnable units
- Draw out the generalities
- Presentation skill, etc.

The above learning theories are intended to give a comprehensive explanation of all learning situations, and all educational activities meant for children, adults, etc., covering both informal and formal learning.

18. English Language Teaching in Tamil Nadu

As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, our Government welcomes English as a link language. In Tamil Nadu, it is made compulsory to learn English from primary level as a second language even in Tamil medium schools. In most of the Government and Government-Aided schools, the medium of instruction is Tamil and rarely in some schools are the subjects taught through the medium of English whereas in Matriculation and Anglo-Indian schools, the medium of instruction is only English.

19. Responsibilities of Language Trainers

The concern of teachers centres in not only illuminating the learners about language but also in bolstering their ability to put in right use the language in diverse situations. The various roles of the trainers in augmenting the learning process are:

- Organizer - by giving clear demonstration to develop organizing skill
- Instructor - to give clear instructions to the students
- Prompter - to motivate the students to answer without shyness and confusion
- Resource or Consultant- to offer assistance for project work or group work
- Controller - as authority to correct knowledge
- Reflective Practitioner- not only doing technical job but also learning from experience.

20. Our Present Scenario

Our learning structure is declining and suffering because it is unable to meet the actual requirements in the communication-based society. The state existing in the schools is one which is conventional, old-fashioned, and inflexible. The most significant apprehension of educational system in our time is, there is a need to expand the learners' interest to know, eagerness to learn, and capability to make complicated and multifaceted choices. The only way is to assist our learners to learn, profoundly and largely. A multidimensional approach in providing flexibile, communicative and interactive environment has to be given to kindle the innate language learning capacity. An environment to experiment and practical application to further the process of language acquisition has to be created.

21. Conclusion

The trainers should create a climate in which a young learner finds chances to make the most of communication techniques in a positive and resourceful environment. The decisive aim of education, of all attempts at teaching, is to make the learners competent of doing things on their own. The four components such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening to build up the proficiency in language have to be incorporated in discipline-specific courses so that it will aid the learners in continuous development. Hence, language learning and acquisition should be in such a way that ensures all the learners optimize their potential for all time success.

22. References

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