

A Psychological Approach in Acquiring Second Language

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ABSTRACT

The learning of English language in schools or colleges proves to be a tough task in which it often doesn't give the satisfactory result. Since the young people spend years of time in studying the English language, they duly pass in the written examination but they fail to command over the language. They fail to communicate in English with the native speakers of English. What are the reasons behind it? The foremost and important reason is that we are not the native speakers and many situational bounds.

When comparing the learning of English language with the mother-tongue it gives really a surprising and shocking result. The difference is that a child acquires the mother-tongue, but he has to put enormous effort to learn the English language. The difference lies in acquiring and learning. This comparison indicates that there must be something basically wrong with the current methods of teaching languages and we need a revolutionary change. Our modern psychology looks for an explanation of the failure of routine methods and formulation of more efficient and fruitful techniques.

Introduction:

There is an important distinction made by linguists between language acquisition and language learning. Children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This is similar to the way they acquire their first language. They get a feel for what is and what isn't correct. In order to acquire language, the learner needs a source of natural communication. The emphasis is on the text of the communication and not on the form. Young students who are in the process of acquiring English get plenty of "on the job" practice. They readily acquire the language to communicate with classmates.

Language learning, on the other hand, is not communicative. It is the result of direct instruction in the rules of language. And it certainly is not an age-appropriate activity for your young learners. In language learning, students have conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about

that knowledge. They can fill in the blanks on a grammar page. Research has shown, however, that knowing grammar rules does not necessarily result in good speaking or writing. A student who has memorized the rules of the language may be able to succeed on a standardized test of English language but may not be able to speak or write correctly.

How Do Children Learn a Second Language?

In general, there are two ways in which children may learn a second language: simultaneously or sequentially

Simultaneous Second Language Learning

Simultaneous learners include children under the age of 3 who are exposed to two languages at the same time. These children may include those who are exposed to one language by parents at home and another language by providers in their early childhood program. Simultaneous learners are also young children whose parents each speak separate languages to them at home (e.g., mother speaks Spanish to child, father speaks Chinese to child).

Before 6 months of age, simultaneous learners learn both languages at similar rates and do not prefer one language over the other. This is because they build separate but equally strong language systems in their brains for each of the languages they hear. These separate systems allow children to learn more than one language without becoming confused. In fact, the pathways infants develop in their brains for each of the languages they hear are similar to the single pathway developed by children who are only exposed to English.

At 6 months, children begin to notice differences between languages and may begin to prefer the language they hear more. This means that parents must be careful to provide similar amounts of exposure to both languages; otherwise, children may begin to drop vocabulary of the language to which they are less exposed.

Sequential Second Language Learning

Sequential Acquisition occurs when a second language is introduced after the first language is well-established (generally after the age of three). Children may experience sequential acquisition if they immigrate to a country where a different language is spoken. Sequential learning may also occur if the child exclusively speaks his heritage language at home until he begins school, where instruction is offered in a different language.

The two great lines of psychological investigation and application, namely psychoanalysis and suggestion, have established the following facts:

1. Disagreeable and tiresome impressions tend to be forgotten or removed from the consciousness into the unconscious by a definite act of repression
2. Every effort is inherently more or less disagreeable and is very apt to arouse resistance, wandering of attention, lack of receptivity or fatigue. The greater the exertion, often, the stronger is the inner opposition and the scantier the result. This is a psychological law which has been formulated by Baudoin as the “Law of Reversed Effort”.
3. External stimuli which are not intensified by an active interest or by an emotion of a pleasant and positive nature can make only superficial and dull impressions which are easily obliterated by others of a more vivid character.

The constant violation of these three fundamental principles by the current methods of teaching languages patently constitutes a condemnation of the latter.

And even when we succeed by means of violence or insistence in making an impression upon the subconscious, compelling it to register and reproduce the words hammered into it, they are apt to remain a kind of dead weight or a series of static impressions, like phonograph records, instead of something vitally incorporated and assimilated. The result is that while we can perform the feat of reciting a series of grammar rules and the correct conjugation of verbs, we cannot understand what the waiter says to us in the restaurant, or express intelligibly to a foreigner our practical needs or our ideas.

We often used to start teaching the foreign languages through the dry rules of grammar with their countless exception, or to conjugate quantities

of wickedly irregular verbs, and we lack in practical oriented teaching. It can be stated in a very simple way, *we must learn foreign language as we learned our mother-tongue by becoming again “little children”*.

The child learns almost exclusively through the capacity of the subconscious to “absorb” without deliberate effort, without “studying” and without “worry”. We should recapture, so far as we can, that childlike state of pure receptivity, of eager assimilation of those strange and welcoming everything new with a happy smile.

Our inner attitude should be of a joyous discovery with full of surprises. This receptive period varies according to the individual. Some people may come under the category of repeating at once what they hear and some may come under the introverted type and they need a longer period to repeat what they hear we must make the learners to read and write the foreign languages at the level of subconscious as like our mother-tongue.

Conclusion:

If we start to be conscious then we will fail in becoming the master in foreign language. As we already dealt, it has to be acquired not learned. The acquiring process needs a harmonious relationship between teacher and pupil in acquiring the English language as in the case between mother and child in acquiring the mother-tongue. This harmonious relationship establishes a happy, friendly relationship which is quite different from the stiff and professional attitude.

As we have seen, it can be acquired far more easily and painlessly if we abandon the current unsatisfactory and artificial methods, and cultivate the wisdom to become again as little children. Let us open our minds and heart to the many voices in which humanity expresses its sorrows and joys, and offers us the fruits of knowledge and beauty it has gathered through the endeavours of its sons.

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1. Assagioli, Roberto – A Psychological Method for Learning Languages.

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2. Paliwal A.K – English Language Teaching.