

Challenges of Adopting and Learning English as a Second Language

Poonam Sindhu¹, Dr. Ankit Gandhi²

^{1,2}Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan

ABSTRACT

Several foreign language teaching methods facilitate the acquisition of a second language. This paper reviews some new pedagogical methods for teaching second languages, which is especially practical for younger L2 learners. Also it is proposed that the Critical Period Hypothesis which states that the critical period for foreign language acquisition ends when the acquirer reaches puberty. Therefore, this work may imply that learning a second language during this “critical period” is useful for foreign language learning. Furthermore, “Affective Filter Hypothesis” links authentic input as a useful tool in the second language classroom because this type of input can lower the “Affective Filter” of the second language learner. The review results of the study confirm that the participants did learn lexical chunks in the target language after being introduced to the L2 via the authentic materials. Additionally, the participants were able to demonstrate acquisition of agreement in number in the L2. The long-term results also confirm the initial set of results. Some solutions for the English learners have also been proposed by the author.

Keywords: English, language, learning, second, adopting.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to study the challenges of adopting and learning English as a second language. Also, this paper tries to investigate the use of authentic input as a teaching technique in the elementary school second language classroom. Children are able to learn and acquire a second language. However, there is a dramatic decline in early foreign language education in the United States. This decline leads to a lack of materials for young second language learners and a lack of methods to teach languages to younger learners. This thesis sets out to prove that authentic materials can lead to second language acquisition of lexical chunks. It also shows how authentic materials may lead up to acquisition of agreement in number in a second language. The study investigates a new method for teaching early second language learners. This method draws upon other pedagogical methods already set in place for second language learners, and adds the component of the use of authentic materials. It examines concepts from generative grammar in order to investigate what the child second language learner has ready and available to them in their brain when beginning to learn and then later acquire the second language. Behaviorism to some extent may also play a small role in second language acquisition.

The role of behaviorism is relevant in that language behavior as an observable behavior. Repetition of input in the form of music, movement, games etc. may be the stimuli and language behavior may be the response. It is the intention of this thesis to investigate if the learner does already have some language components set in place initially at the start of second language learning by investigating an initial state hypothesis. These components would be a result of transfer of structures from L1 such as the NP (noun phrase) with strong number agreement features, and a weak node for gender agreement features, that will reset to strong as input is analyzed. The gender agreement parameter is “weak” in English and will be reset to “strong” in successful learners of Hindi. And, if provided with proper input, such as authentic materials, and proper repetition of that input, the second language learner can acquire a second language through a method that uses authentic materials.

Authentic materials incorporate a variety of learner strategies which makes them a perfect technique for a young five or six year old that is learning a second language. In order to address this issue, authentic input is introduced as a viable method for the implementation of early foreign language classes in the Indian schools. Foreign language education that starts early will in turn lead to attainment higher proficiency levels of a foreign language for the nation’s citizens. In this paper, the author addressed the issue of the need for more early foreign language education programs in India. He argued that these programs need to start in our nation’s elementary schools at the earliest grade level possible in order for the Indian citizens to attain superior proficiency in a second language.

Universal and selective systems of language education

The proposal contains a universal system of language education and a selective system of language education. Both of these systems are currently in use in schools, with the selective system only in partial use. However they are far from being available in all school systems throughout the India. In the universal system, all students have the opportunity to begin foreign language study early in their education and to continue learning for as long as possible. According to the policy proposed by the National Foreign Language Center, this system would be based on models currently occurring in the schools. It follows the sequential patterns for foreign language learning from one grade level to the next.

The selective system has goals for students to attain very high levels of proficiency. It works by allowing students to decide if he or she wants to participate. Because of this it can be limited in the amount of students that it serves. There are a small number of schools using this system. Those using this system however, usually have students attain at the very least Intermediate High proficiency upon high school graduation. This system follows the models of immersion, intensive FLES and content-based approaches to foreign language learning, amongst other methods. This system is relatively new and therefore serves as a demonstration for policymakers to see how foreign language proficiency can be attained.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Southeastern University student body includes individuals from a wide range of countries, cultures, and languages. To reflect the large number of Hindi-speaking students at the university, in this review I have placed particular emphasis on studies regarding Hindi speaking individuals and the challenges they face in producing original written English. The majority of the sources deal with individuals at the undergraduate and scholarly levels. These sources reflect not only the challenges faced by our current undergraduate students but also the challenges they will face in the future as professionals. Throughout this review, the terms “writer” and “speaker” are used interchangeably.

The articles and studies under review deal almost exclusively with written data. Writing in English, as opposed to reading, listening, or speaking, poses a particular challenge for non-native English speakers. These challenges range from translation quandaries to writing dilemmas faced at the pre-university, university, and scholarly levels. For example, Hinkel in a 2004 study published in *Language Teaching Research* noted the differences between native and non-native speaker usage of verbs. The majority of the non-native speakers employed the past tense much more often than did the native speakers.

The Chinese and Indonesian students used the future tense much more than the English students, while the Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Arabic students used it much less. Less than fifty percent of the essays contained perfect or progressive tenses, some opting to use the past tense instead of these more challenging tenses. Only a few of usage differences in verb tense and voice emerged, the first of many challenges encountered by non-native English speakers when writing in English. Various registers are available to researchers who wish to analyze students’ and scholars’ writings. (Registers contain compositions or speeches related to a certain topic, such as medicine or business management. Each register contains writings by only one group of people, such as only scholars or only students.)

Biber, Davies, Jones, and Tracy-Ventura evaluated multiple registers from the Corpus del Español. After analyzing the data results, they found that the written registers contained a larger number of dense, informational structures than the spoken registers. Because of the density of written structures, writing presents a number of challenges that can often be avoided when speaking. I believe that these challenges hold true across all languages, though the language structures involved may be different.

CHALLENGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Pre-University Level Challenges

Translating works, however, is quite different from writing original works in English, and Hindi speakers’ difficulties with English may range with their level of English study. Problems encountered by pre-university students are different from those faced by university students and professional scholars. A researcher conducted a study of thirty typically developing (as opposed to learning impaired) Hindi-speaking English language students between the ages of eight and thirteen from a city in the upper Midwest. The researchers tested the students for their level of cross-linguistic cognate identification in the areas of expressive and receptive vocabulary. (Cognates are words that have similar spellings in both the first language and the second language, for instance, English astronomy and Hindi astronomía.) The study’s results indicated that typically developing students who speak Hindi and are learning English at this age may use cognates to assist themselves in learning English.

The other side of this finding may be that non-cognates pose dilemmas for these students. At the pre-university level, a researcher conducted a study to determine the errors made by Hindi students writing English compositions for the

University Entrance Examination for the University of Delhi. She found that the students had the most difficulty with verbs and the least difficulty with nouns, while adjectives were mid-difficulty. Within the verbs, main verbs were more challenging than modal auxiliary verbs. After dividing all of the students' errors into eight categories (form, grammar, lexis, punctuation, register, style, word, and lexico-grammar), she discovered that the students made more errors in grammar, lexis, and form than in the other categories. Comparing the results of her study, she concludes that Hindi students at this level have trouble with (1) main verbs (more often than with modal auxiliary verbs), (2) third person singular verb forms, (3) plural adjectives, and (4) numeric expressions of nouns. These findings reveal that Hindi students' difficulties with English are not restricted to one single grammatical or syntactical area.

Translation Challenges

Some writing challenges arise from multiple translation possibilities for a single word. These differences in Hindi can lead to translation errors of any and its connotations. Coincidentally, because the Hindi options also have multiple translations, incorrect translation into English may cause misunderstanding or cloud clarity in compositions, term papers, and scholarly articles. Labrador conducted a corpus-based contrastive study to analyze the usage of the English restrictive adjectives and adverbs just, only, sole/solely, alone, unique/uniquely, exclusive/exclusively, and single/singly versus the usage of their common counterparts in original Hindi. In a study published in Languages in Contrast: International Journal for Contrastive Linguistics, Labrador points out that some of the English terms have multiple Hindi equivalents.

Her study found that in English the restrictive adjectives are used more frequently than the restrictive adverbs but that in Hindi the individual restrictive adjectives and adverbs vary in usage frequency. Translators, students, and scholars, therefore, should be careful in choosing the correct comparable term when translating from English to Hindi and vice-versa. An additional area of Hindi-English challenge lies in the English use of -ly adverbs versus the Hindi use of -mente adverbs. This finding also begs the question of whether translation of -mente adverbs from Hindi to English also results in an overabundance of -ly adverbs in translated writings.

Problems of Immediate need

According to research, students learn basic grammar at school level for the purpose of passing only in the tests and in the examinations and not to face any real life situations. Application-oriented advanced grammar is not taught in schools. Furthermore, adequate practice is not given to students to learn a language. This writer totally aligns with Kannan opinion. It is obvious that students only read to pass English language but are not totally committed to its mastery; probably because learners are only taught and expect to regurgitate the experience rather than allowing them to self-discover the intricacies involved in English Language.

Problem of mother tongue (L1) interference in English language learning

Second English language learners experience mother tongue interference phenomenon which deals with problems a learner encounters when he transfers the acquired skills in his native or indigenous language (L1) to his second language (L2). There is clear ignorance of most basic elements of logical interference and most of the students do not have the opportunity to undertake advanced reasoning tasks. Phonetically, learners of English as a second language find it difficult to pronounce certain English words because the sounds are absent from their native languages. Syntactically, the students employ plurality to honour elders.

Problem of shortage of specialist teachers in English

Another problem which English learners encounter is staff shortage. Author explained that—there are academic staff shortages across board particularly in the critical areas of science and technology; Over 60% of the academic staff in the Indian University System is in the category of Lecturer I and below. These shortages are compounded by inter- and intra-sectoral brain drain. It further revealed that Colleges of Education has staff shortfall of 56.9%, Poly/Monotechnics 56.9% and Universities 39.1%. These have implications on the quality of teaching and learning especially at tertiary level. In author opinion, there should be one lecturer to between 20 and 50 students; however, what obtains in our higher institutions is the opposite. Most of the lecture halls where General courses are taught are usually overpopulated and since listening which is the first foundational skill cannot be done in a noisy and rowdy environment, learning is hampered. Moreover, facilitators easily lose control of the class except in situations where colleagues assist in class control.

Students' Psychological Problem

A very important challenge confronting learners of English as a second language is students' fearful attitude towards the use and usage of English especially in the presence of a competent user. A researcher says — it was humiliating to have to speak to ones countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that

Language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own. Speaking English requires a measure of confidence and readiness, however if a speaker feels inadequate to speak it, it may lead to incoherence and incorrect expressions.

Lack of basic and necessary equipment

Lack of basic facilities and equipment is a challenge that hinders effective teaching and learning of English Language. Most schools and colleges in Nigeria lack essential equipment which could have strengthen learners' skills. Most schools do not have language laboratory and well equipped libraries. According to Oluwole (2014:123-124) other challenges confronting the teaching and learning of grammar in Nigeria are:

Language transfer

Language transfer according to him gives rise to interlingua errors which are based on the interference theory. The transfer of learner's first language patterns into those of the second language constitutes one of the bases for interlingua interference. When this transfer has a negative effect on the second language, then there will be problems.

Intralingual Errors

In this category reflect general characteristics of rules of learning. E.g. Over generalization or faulty application of rules, thereby producing incorrect forms of analogy. Learners make inductive generalizations about the target language system based on the data to which they are exposed. As a result of the restriction based on the data, learners who are ignorant of the exceptions to certain rules of grammar generalize and produce incorrect forms by analogy. This makes learners to commit plural error, tense error, error related to abstract noun etc.

Faulty instructional materials and instructional techniques

Some problems such as the aforementioned arise mainly from faulty instructional materials and the pedagogical shortcomings of the teacher.

The inconsistency in the orthography of English

Spelling has been identified as a problem related to the nature of English. This is a problem area to both speakers of English as a second language and the native speakers of English.

SUGGESTIONS / SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACING THE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- English learners must be extensive readers.
- Teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills.
- Learners should read English sentences and think about their structure
- They should learn new words from a dictionary
- They should write a correct English sentence by consulting dictionaries, grammar guides, and the Web
- Learners should practice the pronunciation of English sounds and words
- Government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower teaching and learning of English.
- Parents should arouse the interest of their wards by providing needed materials and conducive learning and studying environment at homes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper highlights the challenges which English Language learners face and equally proffer solutions. Essentially, effective teaching and learning of English will be realistic only when both the learned and learner demonstrate readiness to pay the sacrifices for its attainment.

Bilingual education that is high quality and that promotes full development of two languages goes beyond just leveraging the native language of students in service of better English. It provides an ideal and desirable context to promote the demands of content and language learning of the New Standards by allowing students to use all their language and cultural resources. Finally, bilingual schooling prepares individuals to function in a global society, which has become a cornerstone of education in the twenty-first century.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Nerenz, Anne G. 1999. Standards for a New Century. Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company.
- [2]. O'Grady, William. 2005. How Children Learn Language. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [3]. Orozco, José-Luis. 2003. *Lyrca Infantil*, Volumen 1-5. Los Angeles, California: Arcoiris Records.
- [4]. Krashen, Stephen D. 1982. *Child-Adult Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- [5]. Gilmore, Alex. 2007. Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Lang. Teach.* 40. 97-118.
- [6]. Berko, Jean. 1958. The child's learning of English morphology. *Word* 14. 150-77.
- [7]. Taylor, David. 1994. Inauthentic authenticity or authentic inauthenticity? *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* 1. 1-10.
- [8]. The Center for Applied Linguistics. 2007. <http://www.cal.org/resources/earlyfl/>
- [9]. Thomas, Margaret. 2004. *Universal Grammar in Second Language Acquisition: A History*. London: Routledge.
- [10]. VanPatten, Bill. 2003. *From input to output: a teacher's guide to second language acquisition*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.