



VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Second Language Acquisition and TESOL

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ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

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Abstract

It is a high time to rethink about the ways to make things more productive than just prescriptive. Endless paradigms are set up by the abundant research works done in the trajectory of ELT with a hypothesis that Language can be taught and learnt in a better way than ever before. Though libraries are vomiting the dusty theses penned on and about problems and remedies of ELT and TESOL, language learners and the teachers are not solely free from the classroom tension. Most of the research work end with the prescribed or modified theories, techniques or methodologies; very researchers have been able to reach and address the root problem and its solution. For the speakers whose first language happens to be other than English, learning English has been a big challenge; in the same way for the teachers who teach the non-English speakers, it is still a riddle to ease the teaching and learning process and make it fruitful. Any language teaching primarily aims to enable and empower its learners to speak that particular language and make use of it in their day to day life. In this way, ELT is day by day proceeding to be more utilitarian. Having said this, the moot question still remains unanswered that is to design pedagogy which can help teachers to teach and learners to learn productively. Over the years, teachers, researchers and linguists have been exploring the area with a view to make ELT more fruitful than just imperative. One of the most explored areas in regards of understanding language acquisition is Neurolinguistics which studies the relation between the human brain and its capacity to comprehend, produce and acquire language. Neurolinguistics has become one of the most important perspectives to look at and analyze language. It explores a lot about how a child adopts / acquires language with different stages of brain development. This research paper tries to see in what capacities Neurolinguistics can help English teachers to modulate teaching methodologies or find remedies in order to fruitfully and productively teach English as a second language to the speakers of other language(s). This paper is based on the hypothesis that better results can be obtained if language learning is converted into language acquisition.

Lead in

Language being the most powerful vehicle of ideas has always been a subject of wonder and research for



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ISSN 2454-8596

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human race. Among all the animals of the earth, it is only the human being who owns the boon of language. Human brain is the miracle of the miracles which holds the capacity of acquiring, learning, comprehending and producing language. Though all other animals do communicate in their own way, human being is the only one who is blessed to communicate using language. Researchers, linguistics, psychologists, neurologists and neuroscientists are busy for decades to know how come human brain is capable to adopt, acquire, comprehend and produce language. Human brain is also capable to identify the language amid other sounds, voice and noise. It is still a matter of research and exploration how a child acquires language and how adults learn second language(s). Neurolinguistics is a science which systematically studies the relation between the human brain and language and thereby introduces us some parts of the brain which are designed exclusively to functioning with language.

Second Language Acquisition

Any teacher associated with teaching English must know these two jargons i.e. Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Language(s) and Second Language Acquisition. Normally teaching English becomes little more challenging when the learners' first language happens to be other than English. Teaching English to such students has remained a subject of research and exploration for decades. Especially in Europe when the people of non-English speaking nations felt the need to migrate to the countries for which learning English for the purpose of Business and Communication was the foremost condition. This gave rise to English Language Teaching in all over the world. The teachers had mostly such students whose first language was different from English in regards of Grammar, Accent, Syntax and most of Culture. Therefore it was not less than a challenge both for teachers and the learners to teach and learn English as second language. This made teachers, scholars and researchers made think about some scientific ways, techniques and methods to teach English as a Second Language. This was one of the biggest reasons for SLS coming into the picture. Thus SLA is simply a kind of process by which a person learns second language. The whole science named Neurolinguistics exists which tells us, by the way, how a child acquires language without any formal training or teaching. That makes it clear for us that language acquisition is something which happens from within whereas learning requires outer efforts. Let us have a brief glance on what Neurolinguistics tells about the human brain and language acquisition.

Neorolinguistics is actually one of the branches of Cognitive Neuroscience. It studies the neural mechanism in the human brain. It scientifically investigates the properties of human brain to comprehend, production and acquisition of language. While teachers are busy in teaching second language to the human mind with or



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ISSN 2454-8596

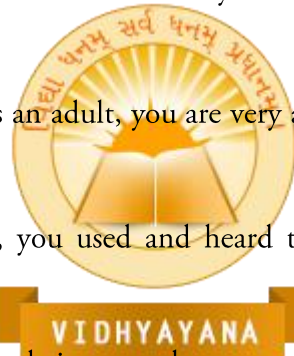
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without the help of first language, Neurolinguistics tells you how human mind acquires first language without any formal teaching, training, techniques or exams. Child, so to say, acquires the first language simply in the absence of structured and well organized teaching. Neurolinguistics tells us about how at all it happens. Therefore while thinking about the Teaching English as a Second Language, it becomes important for both teachers and the students about the process through which a human brain acquires Language.

There is a basic difference between 'learning' and 'acquisition'. Learning is a formal process whereas acquisition happens naturally. A book entitled *Teaching English Language Learners* elaborates the difference between Learning and Acquisition which are as below.

- There are some major differences between learning your first language and learning another language as an adult.
- When learning your first language, everything you did contributed to learning how to understand and communicate in that language. You did not view yourself as learning a language, it just happened naturally.
- When learning a second language as an adult, you are very aware that you are trying to learn a language. It is an intentional process.
- When learning your first language, you used and heard the language in all of your interactions and settings.
- Many second language learners use their target language only in the classroom, and don't hear it or practice using it regularly outside the classroom.
- When learning your first language, you are learning vocabulary and sentence structure without interference from a different language's vocabulary and structures.
- When learning a second language, you are relearning vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, pronunciation, cultural concepts, etc. Habits and practices from the first language carry over. This can be confusing.
- When learning your first language, you were generally not afraid to try again and again after making mistakes.
- When learning a second language, you may be embarrassed when you make a mistake speaking the new language. You become reluctant to try again or reluctant to speak, for fear that you will make a mistake.



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This makes it more difficult to learn to speak the language. The best language learners are those who are willing to take risks, even if it means making mistakes.

- When learning your first language, you initially required a small vocabulary and simple sentence structure to communicate. Our need for increased vocabulary and fluency gradually developed over several years.
- When learning a second language as an adult, we are immediately faced with the need for a large vocabulary and more complex language forms. It can seem daunting and overwhelming.
- When learning our first language there were several years of listening and speaking it before we learned to read and write the language.
- When learning a second language as an adult, all four steps — listening, speaking, reading, and writing — are usually presented and taught together.

(2014 : 49)

The long list of differences between learning and acquisition leads as well as helps English teachers to rethink about teaching English as Second Language. It is important to note than the process of Second Language Acquisition is different in many way from First Language Acquisition. Both learning and acquisition as process differ with age and time. It is stunning to learn how a child adopts the language which surround him / her. We all know that the language any child listens form his / her early childhood becomes his / her mother language. And as stated above, the child acquires that language without any kind of formal training, teaching or drilling of grammar which normally happens in the class rooms in a quite formal way.

“A new view of language acquisition talks about how infants acquire language and how early learning is achieved in a purely social context. The evidence suggests social learning shapes the neural framework of the brain for language and communication. Using brain imaging bilingual babies often show up activity in two overlapping areas, one for each language. I saw mentions of ‘social interaction’, ‘mapping’ and ‘multiple listening’ in infants and then second language acquisition was mentioned towards the end”

(West Jason, 9)

The present research anticipates that if the teachers teaching English to the speakers or the students of other language(s) understand this mechanism thoroughly, the teaching learning process will become easier and smoother. Secondly, if the language teachers understand the process of learning and acquisitions, most of their challenging class room situations will be resolved. Though it is further a subject of research how the



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English Language Teaching Classroom be turned into social context. In this regard, Dr. Desmond Thomas of International Academy University of Essex talks in detail about the Authenticity in TESOL. In one of his lectures, he talks to his listeners about how artificially the English teachers teach English to the learners.

Teaching English to the Speaker of Other Languages

Adrienne Herrell and Michael Jordan mention in the preface of their book entitled “*Fifty Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners*”

“The United States become more ethically and linguistically diverse every year. More than 90 per cent of new residents come from non-English-speaking countries. The number of students with non-English-speaking background represents the fastest growing group of this population. In the number of English learners grew 70 percent and is projected to grow even more (National Clearing house for Bilingual Education, 1999).The 2000 U.S. Census identifies 20 percent of school-age children as non-native English speakers. (Jamieson, Curry, & Martinez, 2001)”

Something has made the English teachers all around the world to sit and think about the even better ways to teach English and that is the rising number of the English learners whose first language is not English’ especially then when the English language is different in many ways from the root language. For example, the Indian learners whose first language is either Hindi or Gujarati mostly find it difficult to learn English simply because English falls different in Grammar and Phonology than that of Gujarati or Hindi. That is one of the reasons why Gujarati people can at least speak considerable Hindi because the Grammar of Hindi and Gujarati is same in many ways. The syntax of both the languages also matches affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences.

तमारुं	नाम	शुं	छे?
आपका	नाम	क्या	है?

Similarly English Grammar is easier for a French speaker because many Grammatical properties of both the languages match. Moreover the history of English language also tells us that English language has adopted many French words in its use, however the aboriginal French words have gone extinct and what we can see today is its English form.

Same is not the case with Gujarati and English and Hindi and English. English is different from Gujarati and



Hindi in its Grammar, phonology, culture and literature. Therefore in most bilingual or multilingual countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, English is taught using Grammar Translation Method or Structural Approach which does not help much in strengthening learners to speak English. But in countries like US, Canada, Australia and UK where the teachers have to teach the non-English learners, Methods like Translation fade and don't work because the teachers and / or the students are monolingual. Another very big reason is the kind of English students need to have is far more different than that of they learnt in their school or colleges. TESOL for many more reasons is a worldwide discipline in which teachers have to teach English to the speakers of other language(s).

One of the main discoveries of modern linguistics is that it made us aware that all the languages we speak are similar in astonishing respects; they manifest the same pattern, follow the same rules, they are learnt in exactly the same way, and that all the differences are only superficial. So, in a sense we all speak the same language. This was captured by Chomsky in an excellent metaphor in an excellent book of his titled Language and Mind”

Further, the same article goes on explaining this point in these words,

“Take a child that was born in China, and have him raised in Saudi Arabia and he'll grow up speaking Arabic. What does that say to you? It says that a human child is hardwired to learn any language and that all human languages, say Mandarin and Arabic in this case are fundamentally the same, if they weren't, the task of child to learn any language would be impossible. This has massive implications, the greatest of which is that all the 7000 human languages have the same source and that every language spoken today evolved from the same great-great...great-grandmother tongue...”

Conclusion

The piles of research by now in the huge diameter of SLA and TESOL help us to construct the strong assertion that English Teacher anywhere in the world ought to know the doctrines and prime difference between learning and acquisition second language. Without knowing the fundamental facts of how a human brain is capable to acquire, comprehend and produce language, all methods and techniques will puff but won't help neither teachers nor learners.



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ISSN 2454-8596

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