

Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: In this age of globalisation, most of the people of this world are becoming multilingual. The need to learn more than one language is seen in different aspects of people's lives. Consequently, numerous studies on the acquisition of second language have garnered interest in various academic disciplines. This paper aims to discuss the stages that are necessary for learning a second language and analyse the factors that obstruct the acquisition it.

Introduction: Language is the medium to express people's feelings, thoughts and emotions via symbols and signs. Through these symbols and signs, people's thoughts and feelings are encoded and decoded. Generally, the discussion of the topic of language acquisition is divided into two parts- first language acquisition and second language acquisition. The language that a child learns after his or her birth is given the status of the first language or mother tongue. The meaning of the second language acquisition which is abbreviated as SLA can briefly be looked at in two ways- in the general sense, it means the learning of any second language and in the deeper sense, it implies the method via which people learn or acquire the second language. While the first language is acquired unconsciously, the acquisition of the second language happens with consciousness. In the discussion of the second language acquisition, we can learn how the formal language education helps to learn a language consciously. It is noteworthy that children can acquire a second language easily and faster than adults. It is difficult for adults to gain the same amount of efficiency in the second language that they show in the first language and various factors are influential in this case. Acquiring the second language is possible after going through some stages. Only after overcoming the obstacle of each of the stages, the acquisition of the second language becomes possible.

Objective: This paper aims to discuss the stages that are necessary for learning a second language and analyse the factors that obstruct the acquisition it.

Main Discussion and Findings: The issue of the second language acquisition is a significant topic in the field of linguistics. Various linguistic questions are related to this topic. The linguists become interested in this topic after seeing that people cannot gain the equal level of efficiency in the second language which they possess in the first language. The study of this topic started to get the answers of various linguistic questions. Currently, it is an important branch of linguistics. It is worthy of mention that besides linguistics, in other disciplines like psychology and anthropology, the topic of the second language acquisition is

broadly discussed. Therefore, the topic comes under the multidisciplinary study. In this paper, the topic is studied from linguistic perspective.

There are many differences seen between learning the first language and a second language. Among all the differences, the most significant difference is purpose. Although it is thought that there is a particular purpose for learning the first language, actually there is no purpose for learning it. The interest to gain efficiency in the first language arises unconsciously in people's mind only to fulfil the need of communicating with others. On the other hand, in the second language acquisition, people always proceed with a purpose. Without purpose, the systematic learning of a second language is not possible. A second language can be acquired by both formal and informal education. The need for learning second language arises from various reasons. In this age of globalisation, it is almost impossible to live as monolingual. Due to the increase of the dominance of English, it has become an essential medium of communication in the present time. For most of the students studied in English medium, English becomes the second language. On the other hand, when people of one place or country travel to or settle permanently in another place or country due to education, business or professional purpose, learning the language of that new place becomes very necessary. Without the native language, the communication in the new place is not possible and consequently, people are compelled to learn the language of the new place as the second language. The acquisition of a second language is achieved only by going through various stages. Very few people can achieve the same level of efficiency in the second language which they have in their first language. Maximum people stop at one of the five stages that are required to learn a second language. They can gain that much efficiency in the second language that can be used only to express their feelings. There are five stages which are required to learn a second language and these are described below:

The first stage of the second language acquisition is called the silent stage. Although it is called a stage, it is not very clear like the other stages. This stage can last from few hours to some months depending on the person who is learning it. In this stage, new learners focus on hearing and practising the pronunciation of the words of the language. In this stage, they start practising the language by pronouncing the words alone without understanding the meaning of the words.

1. Pre-Production Stage: The acquisition of the second language actually starts from this stage. At this stage, learners start to learn one or two words, but cannot speak or write. This stage lasts for almost six months. At this phase, learners can understand while they hear the language, but they cannot reply because the wordstock remains inactive. . There seem to be average five hundred words in the learners' wordstock. Although the comprehensive ability remains at a low level initially, it starts slowly. At this phase, the learners who learn the language by formal education are taught the language via pictures and gestures. Due to the lack of confidence, learners fail to draw connection between words and meanings. But this stage is significant because in this stage, learners' habit of listening is built. The learners gain knowledge about how and in what context words should be used.

2. Primary Production: This stage lasts from six months to one year. In this stage, average one thousand words are present in the learners' wordstock. Among these words, some remain active while some are inactive. It is from this stage where learners start saying sentences on their own, expressing their feelings and gain confidence to use words, syllables and sentences in the new language. It is noteworthy that only those words will be collected in the learners' wordstock in which the learners frequently communicate. After hearing the words used in the surrounding, the learners become familiar with their meanings and usage and consequently, they gain confidence to use these words. But, the words used by the learners in this stage are not completely accurate. Under the influence of the sounds of their first language, the pronunciation of the second language becomes similar to the first language. Besides, in this stage, the tendency of not accepting his or her mistake in the use of the language is seen among the learners.

3. Emergence of Speech: This stage lasts for three years since the starting of the learners' learning process. In this stage, average three thousand words are collected in the wordsstock of the learners. Due to the increase of active words, the production of sentences becomes lucid than before. Along with the learners' success in the production of lucid and short sentences, their comprehensive ability also increases. The exchange of feelings and emotions in the second language actually starts in this stage. Although the learners cannot express their feelings very accurately, but they gain the minimum efficiency to express it in an understandable manner.

In every language, there are some social languages. In a society, without the knowledge of the acceptable language, the learning of that language is not possible. In this stage, the learners learn about the different social aspects of the second language. For example, in English, words like May, Please, Sorry, Excuse me etc. are social language. People who try to acquire English as their second language start using these words in this stage. Some of the examples are- Please shut the door, May I have your contact number please etc. It is worthy of mention that although the learners can express their feelings lucidly in this phase, they cannot describe a deep topic comprehensibly. For instance, a person who learns Assamese as his or her second language can say that Bihu is the traditional festival of Assam. But, he or she will not be able to explain how and the rituals with which Bihu is observed. Most learners of the second language seem to stop in this stage.

4. Middle Effortlessness: This stage is the fourth and a significant stage in the second language acquisition. People who acquire a second language with purpose can reach this stage between three and five years. In this stage, people can articulate their feelings clearly and confidently. Especially when people remain in touch with the language most of the time of a day, they can reach this stage fast. In this stage, almost six thousand words are collected in the learners' wordstock and they remain active. When the learners can explain complicated things and express feelings clearly, it can be said that they have reached this stage. Although learners can use the language in speaking and writing due to their increased confidence and courage, their usage contains grammatical mistakes. In this stage also, people can't leave the habit of speaking in the second language only after thinking in their mother tongue and consequently, the grammar of their mother tongue seems to influence their usage

of the second language. Hence, grammatical mistakes are generally seen in this kind of learners. Although the learners cannot achieve complete efficiency in the second language in this stage, they achieve the ability to express their feelings and communicate with other people.

5. High Fluency: For a second language learner, it takes four to ten years to reach this stage. Any person cannot gain the same amount of efficiency in the second language which they have in the first language, but if one reaches this stage successfully, he or she gains almost equal level of efficiency shown by the first language speakers. It is worthy of mention that we are using the word “almost” here because the people of this stage cannot achieve the complete efficiency that the first language speakers show. Rather, they can go the near of complete efficiency. If the learners frequently communicate with the first language speakers, then they can achieve a high level of fluency in the second language. They can also discuss deep and complicated ideas like the first language speakers. Along with learning minute details of the second language, people of this stage gain knowledge about the proverbs and idioms in the language. But, despite gaining the efficiency, a few grammatical mistakes are still seen because the learners’ first language influences them throughout their lives.

Although a second language is acquired by going through these five stages, the learning is not equally easy or difficult for everyone. There are differences in the efficiency in the second language from person to person.

In acquiring the first language, all the people seem to be successful whereas, people’s success rate in the acquisition of a second language is not the same. Every person stops at different stages of the second language acquisition process because the confidence that people have from the beginning in acquiring the first language is not equally present in their acquisition of the second language. In the acquisition of a second language, psychological and external factors influence the learners’ learning process. Some of these factors are described below-

Age is a universal obstruction in acquiring a second language. People’s capacity to learn language decreases as their age increases. After birth, people’s brains remain like a white blank paper. After the collection of the acquired sound, meaning, words etc. of the first language from the surrounding environment, people get the linguistic competence in their first language. As the age increases, the limit of wordstock of the first language or the mother tongue increases. The first language captures the maximum place in people’s mind at a certain age and therefore, there is a lack of place for the wordstock of the second language. Thus, age influences the learning process of the second language. According to this survey, as much as the age is low, the second language can be learned easily. For instance, the Assamese students studied in English medium can easily acquire English as their second language. But, in the middle or the last phase of people’s lives, a person cannot learn the second language easily. Despite arduous hard work, it will be difficult for him or her to overcome all the five stages. He or she will be compelled to stop at the second or the third stage. Along with age, fossilization also obstructs the learning process of a second language. The grammar of the first language is fossilized in people’s mind as the age increases and

consequently, the grammatical rules and regulation of the second language is influenced by the grammatical rules and regulations of the first language. The sentence construction of every language is different. For instance, the sentence construction of the English is subject+verb+object, on the other hand, the sentence construction of Assamese is subject+object+ verb. Hence, when an Assamese speaker tries to learn English, the fossilisation of the Assamese grammatical rules can create problem. Besides, some sounds that are present in English are not seen in Assamese. For instance, the pronunciation of ch used in words like chicken, chilli, change etc. are not present in the Assamese language. Therefore, despite learning English, the pronunciation of “ch” becomes difficult for most Assamese people without consciousness. Moreover, when one tries to articulate feelings in the second language, he or she has to think in the mother tongue first and then articulates. In such cases, the grammar of the first language influences the speaking of the second language and hence, the use of the second language shows grammatical mistakes. The superior or inferior attitude that one possesses for a language also determines whether the acquisition of that language will be easy or difficult for that a person. For instance, people look at some language with respect such as English. English is now used as a lingua franca throughout the world and hence, this language is treated with respect worldwide and wanted to be acquired as a second language. Due to this interest and respect, many people can acquire it successfully. But a language seen with an inferior attitude cannot be acquired as a second language. To acquire a language easily, it is very necessary to have love and respect for it.

Lack of self-confidence and hesitation also influence the process of acquiring a second language. To use a newly learned language, self confidence is very much needed. Despite learning the grammatical rules and regulations, if one does not have the confidence to use it, the acquiring of second language is not possible. “Will it be correct?” –the presence of this fear obstructs the acquisition of the second language.

Conclusion: In the present time, it is almost impossible to live as unilingual. To adjust in this world, students, businessmen, job employees etc. often feel the need of other language besides their mother tongue. Therefore, the topic of second language acquisition has attracted the attention of the educated people. Various research and discussions are also conducted on this particular topic. In Assam, the research and discussion on this topic are still in a nascent phase. Every person in Assam generally seems to learn a different language besides his or her mother tongue. Along with the tribal people, the Bengalis, Biharis, Marowaris etc. living in Assam eagerly acquire Assamese as their second language. On the other hand, Assamese language speaking people acquire Hindi or English as their second language. Therefore, the topic of second language acquisition is very relevant in place like Assam. Moreover, there is a possibility of doing research and discussion on this topic in Assam in the near future.

Reference:

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