Identification of Tasks that Promote a Quick and Effective Learning of Second Language in Indian Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the second language acquisition in a language classroom and the tasks that promote L2 learning. Any person learning another language other than his/her native language is second language learning. During the process of acquiring second language the learner very often finds difficult in transferring his knowledge from L1 to L2. Moreover, there may be both internal and external factors that influence L2 learning. The learners' plans of learning L2 may not be flexible always; this kind of situation, at times results in confusion and the learners lose interest to learn L2. Furthermore, it was found that under instructed conditions the learners were able to learn simple grammar and pragmatic features of L2; whereas to draw the meanings of words in L2, to pay attention to most of the syntactical and structural aspects of L2 the conditions had to be enhanced. In this paper I tried to administer few selected tasks to resolve some of the issues that arouse as a result of research in Second Language Acquisition. This is based on my own experience. I followed interest-oriented learner-centred approach which drew the attention of the learners to the utmost. I even tried administering these tasks in my UG general English classes which helped the learners to learn L2 efficiently and successfully. In the process of administering these tasks it was found that the learners were motivated to develop knowledge of L2 as well as to develop the Skills of the target language easily and effectively; thus, helping the learners to accomplish their ultimate goal of achieving communicative competence in L2.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Native Language, language skills, language classroom, instructed learning, enhanced learning, interest-oriented learner-centred approach, tasks, motivation, syntax, communicative competence.

Introduction

`   Any person learning another language other than his/her native language is second language learning. During the process of acquiring second language the learner very often finds difficult in transferring his knowledge from L1 to L2. Moreover, there may be both internal and external factors that influence L2 learning. The learners' plans of learning L2 may not be flexible always; this kind of situation, at times results in confusion and the learners lose interest to learn L2. Much of the research was done in SLA(Second Language Acquisition) which said that L2 learners face many problems and there may be many reasons for these problems, viz., age, lack of interest, methods, modules and mechanics, interaction and environment, automaticity and control, literacy and skill development,

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individual differences and cognitive variables, motivation, anxiety, personality and affective variables, interlanguage pragmatics, etc.

As a result of research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) there were many issues that arouse. Let us find out and try to resolve few to the possible extent.

Note: This paper is based on a few issues mentioned in SLA research and SLT pedagogy. Referred to the article published on the site (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259867284_State-of-the-art_SLA_research_and_language_teaching). The title of the article is 'State-of-the-art: SLA research and language teaching' published in January, 1997.

First, let's focus on attention and learning conditions of the learners. Here it is required to draw the attention of the learners and provide them a suitable platform to learn L2. At the outset to make the learners attentive in the class the teacher can talk about the topic that interests them the most. For example, I want to teach the structural aspect of the language, syntax. I may ask few questions related to the topic in which they are interested. In the introductory session I will teach them how a sentence is constructed and where do the predicate and the subject positioned. Later I'll talk about the object and its types. This could happen both in enhanced teaching and instructed teaching conditions.

Task:1
1. Ask one of the students to say a sentence in English
2. Ask another student to translate the same into his native language.
3. Shall explain how differently the subject and predicate are positioned in both the sentences.
4. Now ask them to write a few example-sentences in both L2 and L1.
5. Give a list of sentences with jumbled words and ask the students to arrange them into meaningful sentences.

Findings: 1. Students show eagerness to write sentences both in L2 and L1.
2. They are excited to identify subject and predicate in the sentences and incidentally learn that L2 has SVO pattern which is different from L1, mostly.
3. While constructing new sentences thelearners show much interest in learning different types of sentences; easily identify the direct object and indirect object in the sentences.

Strategies employed: These may differ from student to student depending on their learning styles. They would employ strategies like visualization, co-operative learning, memory and cognitive strategies, etc.

Secondly let's focus on form, meaning and use. The focus on form is an approach in English education and it is proposed by Michael Long in 1988.In task-1 the learners learnt to form new sentences that are structurally correct and are meaningful. Here in Task-2 let's see whether the teacher's intrusion is required.

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Task-2

1. Distribute a hand out on the topic the learners are interested. For example handout may be on 'Cricket' a sport.
2. Ask them to read and underline the difficult words.
3. Since the topic is known to them learners quickly learn the meanings of most of the words in the hand out. For example the words like bat, pitch, cricket, etc.
4. But at some points they may be confused and here the teacher should involve for sustaining their excitement and interest to do that task. Teacher should explain by using audio visual method.
5. Ask each student to speak on the topic. Here the teacher should correct their grammatical errors and the pronunciation of the words after each session.

Findings:

1. Learners' learn new words from the hand out.
2. They try to guess the word meaning from the context.
3. Assume that the topic that interests them is 'cricket' a sport. There is high scope for the learners to add more words to their lists of vocabulary. Ex: cricket- a sport and an insect, Bat- a mammal and a wooden object used to hit the ball, pitch- frequency of voice and the flat strip laid between the wickets and so on.
4. This is the point where teacher's intervention is required. S/he can show the pictures to bring in the differences or use them in the sentences to differentiate the meaning of the words.
5. Learners will jot down the teacher's feedback and try not to repeat the language errors in future.

    Strategies employed: Social strategies, inquiry, visualization, underlining key words, guessing intelligently the meaning of unknown words, memory strategies, compensation strategies, etc.

    Third issue would be about task design and interaction. The teacher plays a vital role in designing the tasks where there would be maximum L2 learning. Teacher should also be aware of the tasks of different levels of complexity and should know how to administer them to the learners in an order.

Task-3

1. In continuation to the previous task the teacher should design tasks that range from simple to that of complex level.
2. In the beginning students are asked to write synonyms for the underlined words in task-2.
3. Then ask them to write antonyms for the same.
4. Now let them use the underlined words in their own sentences.
5. Introduce them to phrasal verbs which have similar meaning of the underlined words.
    Ex: word: meet //related phrasal verb: come across

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6. Introduce them to one word substitutes and then idioms.

Findings:

1. Learners learn the synonyms and antonyms of the new words that are underlined in Task-2. Here the teacher can help the learner to refer to a dictionary.
2. Learners learn to use a dictionary.
3. While using the words in their own sentences, learners will be more careful in structuring the sentences (learnt in Task-1) and avoid mistakes to the possible extent.
4. Learners seem to be excited to study phrasal verbs, one word substitutes, idioms, etc.

Strategies employed: Meta-cognitive strategies, mnemonic strategies, self-efficacy, affective strategies, etc.

The most important fact to observe here is how well the learner tries to develop the four basic language skills-(LSRW) in L2 when compared to the same skills in L1. Do the Indian learners face difficulties in developing these skills in L2 (English)? Let's find out. The Indian learners especially from rural background may find difficulty in learning L2 due to following the reasons:

- Though English is known, most of them do not use it.This may be due to shyness or the feeling of embarrassment when they make mistakes.
- Weak in grammar.
- Aware of limited vocabulary; so hesitate to speak in English.
- Unable to pronounce the words correctly.
- Lack of exposure to L2 (practice/use).

The learners can overcome these problems if they are determined to use the target language in and outside the classroom. The teacher should motivate the learners to listen to stories, songs, news, etc. in English to learn the correct pronunciation. Once the learner learns to listen carefully then s/he would try to speak in L2 to respond. During speaking the learner will commit errors which could be identified and analysed in the presence of the teacher. Here s/he learns correct pronunciation, word stress and intonation, punctuation, new words, etc. Once the learner improves his/her pronunciation skills then the teacher should encourage them to read anything that interests them and it should be written in English. Here s/he will learn more new words along with the structural and semantic components of L2. This is the point where the learner builds up confidence and will improve his/her writing skills. While writing s/he uses the new words s/he learnt from listening and reading. The tasks that would help the learners to learn an error free L2 may be illustrated in the following way.

Task-4 (Improving Listening Skill)

1. Play an audio on a topic that interests the learner.
2. Ask the learners to write what they heard.

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3. Ask them to listen to the same audio again
4. Ask them to check their write up for any missing information.
5. Finally ask each one to speak about the topic they listened to.

Task-5 (Improving Listening and Speaking Skills)

   Give some exercises like information transfer or giving directions, etc.
1. Divide the students into pairs. One student in each pair will be asked to listen to the directions.
2. Ask that student to give the directions orally to the other student.
3. The other student should be able to follow the directions given by his team mate.
4. The other student should show the map on which the directions are marked.

Findings:

- Students would be excited to learn L2 in pairs or groups.
- They learn how to use L2 and will be more comfortable to work with peers rather than in the presence of a teacher.
- The other student finds that his friend has given him the right directions to reach his destination.
- Then that student is said to be doing good in using L2.
- They will be more careful in listening to the audios and feel enthusiastic to talk about the topic that they listened.
- Students never give up speaking either wrong or right when they work in teams. Eventually they overcome the shyness and develop confidence to speak individually.

Strategies employed: compensation strategies, social and affective strategies.

Task-6 (Improving Speaking and Reading Skills)
1. Students read the map(task-5) and correct their mistakes.
2. Now ask the students to write a paragraph on how to direct a person to his destination.(task-5)or
3. Provide a bar graph and ask to read it and transfer the information conveyed by the given graph to the class.
4. Provide a handout which has the write up of the topic they listened to in task-4.
5. Ask them to read and answer the questions that follow the text.

Findings:

- Since the students had already listened to it under task-4 they feel easy to read the given text.
- High scope for the learners to inculcate the habit of Reading.
- This habit of reading will improve their vocabulary and their knowledge in constructing grammatically correct sentences.

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Strategies employed: prior knowledge, key word reading, compensation strategies, etc.

Task-7 (Improving Reading and Writing Skills)
1. Ask the student to write the summary of the text given in task-4.
2. Now give them a new topic to read. Once they finish reading ask them to summarize.
3. After this ask them to further condense the matter.
4. Let the students' pair up and ask one to read the condensed part. Other student listens to him/her and will write about what s/he heard.
5. Later give few exercises like showing them a picture and asking them to write a story on it
6. Give them few thought cues and ask them to use these hints to develop a paragraph.

Findings:
- Learners come up with good write ups in the beginning
- They seemed to be happy to take up a task which could be worked with his/her team mate.
- They learn to bring in the coherence, cohesion and unity in their writings.

Strategies employed: prior knowledge, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, social strategies, affective strategies, etc.

Many issues mentioned as a result of the research in SLA can be solved to the possible extent by following communicative approach and task-based teaching and learning. The learners show interest when they are exposed to the situations that demand the use of L2 in classroom and beyond the classroom. They may be involved in activities like role plays, debates, group discussions, extempore sessions, story- telling, jam sessions, etc. where they get maximum opportunities to speak in L2. Moreover, learners feel excited working with their peer groups under the guidance of a teacher. In such situations they are self-motivated and will pay attention to whatever they do. This kind of practice in L2 will help them to live successfully in authentic situations too.

Conclusion

English language in India is not considered as a foreign language. It is taught has a second language and this is not new to Indians as they had a good exposure to the language because of the British. Yet while learning this language the Indian learners face many problems. This may be due to less exposure to the language compared to L1. Not all speak in this language and even if one does the others criticize him/her. But now irrespective of what others say most of the learners are trying to improve LSRW skills in L2; because they realized the importance of English in the world. They are striving hard to accomplish the ultimate goal of communicative competence in L2 which in fact, enhances their career prospects. Language is not learnt as a subject but through communication. Skills in L1 are acquired easily as they were using it continuously; whereas the skills in L2 is time taking and little difficult because L2 usage is limited in terms of factors like time, age of the person, fear of, embarrassment, physical conditions, lack of interest, etc. It is difficult to acquire because some will memorize vocabulary, grammar and some discourage themselves as they feel that there is

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no time to spend in learning L2. Some may fail to grasp the correct pronunciation of L2 as they form certain habits in their childhood days. They may utter the sound which they learnt in L1 and cannot change in L2 because of the mother tongue influence. Acquisition of second language will take place when the learners are motivated to use L2 more than the L1. Much of the time could be allotted to use L2 rather than learn L2. For making this possible the teachers can adopt task-based teaching and learning. Because tasks are the only means to reach the learners and push them to use L2 meaningfully by doing as many language activities as possible. Teacher's feedback towards the end of each task is highly required. The learners' tasks performances shall depend on the parameters provided viz. Time to do the task, prior knowledge they bring to tasks, number of task components that demand learner's attention, etc. It is essential to apply the results of SLA research while preparing syllabuses and course books. It is noted to develop task-based materials which enhances L2 acquisition to the utmost.

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