

Facilitating Second language learning through the use of the mother tongue in Teacher talk

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Abstract:

There are several factors, which affect, the language learning process. Various theories of language learning have influenced second language acquisition. Research has established that the environment, in which the language learner is placed, plays a crucial role in the learning of the language. In the context of second language learning, for most regional medium learners, exposure to the target language outside the classroom is Minimized. The classroom is the only place where they are exposed to English. In this context, language input to the learners becomes very crucial. Input which is made comprehensible, accelerate the rate of learning. Negotiated and modified interaction makes the input comprehensible. The teacher is the only source of input for majority of second language learners, the functional aspects in teacher talk serves as rich language input to the learners. The language teaching methodology adopted by the teacher, while teaching the components of language exposes the learners to language in various contexts. Second language acquisition research has established that input plays a significant role in the learning of a language. Researchers have claimed that the input is a necessary condition for language learning. It is believed that the child picks up the language provided in the environment. Therefore there is an argument which says, the input which is modified based on the current competence level of the learner is significant.

Introduction:

There are several factors, which affect, the language learning process. Various theories of language learning have influenced second language acquisition. Research has established that the environment, in which the language learner is placed, plays a crucial role in the learning of the language. In the context of second language learning, for most regional medium learners, exposure

to the target language outside the classroom is Minimized. The classroom is the only place where they are exposed to English. In this context, language input to the learners becomes very crucial. Input which is made comprehensible, accelerate the rate of learning. Negotiated and modified interaction makes the input comprehensible. The teacher is the only source of input for majority of second language learners, the functional aspects in teacher talk serves as rich language input to the learners. The language teaching methodology adopted by the teacher, while teaching the components of language exposes the learners to language in various contexts. The role of L1 in second language acquisition is a much researched aspect. Regional medium learners, in particular come from poor social economic and linguistic backgrounds. For these learners the exposure to the target language outside the classroom is limited. Therefore, the teachers and students in the regional medium classes, relay to a large extent on the mother tongue for the teaching and learning of English. For such learners, the L1 plays a major role in second language acquisition. The teacher uses L1 while teaching English, which helps the learners understand the lessons better,. L1 is also used to modify and make the input comprehensible to the learners. Thereby, giving scope for interaction, which results in language learning. The teacher performs a variety of language functions in the classroom, which provide rich language input to the learners. Using L1 systematically, while performing these function facilitates second language learning. There has been evidence in L2 research to ascertain the importance of L1 in Language teaching.

Language learning theories:

In 1950s and 1960s structural linguistics and psycholinguistics gave a new direction to the observation of process of first language acquisition and second language learning. Primarily the focus was on first language acquisition and subsequently the process of second language acquisition also examined in detail.

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Research has established three language theories viz., behaviourist views nativist views and interactions views. These theories are presented in terms of three different views on the role of input and interaction in second language acquisition. According to behaviourists the environment is a crucial factor, which enables language learning. Behaviourists believe that children come into the world with 'Tabula rasa' i.e., without any preconceived notions about language. The behaviouristic approach focuses on the overtly observable response. According to this theory, any kind of learning could be accounted for in terms of a series of stimuli and responses. This is how they believed that first language acquisition took place. The behaviourists believed that second language learning also occurred on similar lines. Thus according to the behaviourists the child acquires or learns a language by imitating the language to which s/he is exposed. Therefore, according to this view, language input has a crucial role to play in language acquisition. Skinner B.F. (1961). The nativist school explained that the child possesses an innate biological endowment that makes learning possible. That is, human beings possess an innate ability to learn Language successfully.

Chomsky termed this innate mechanism as the language Acquisition device (LAD). Chomsky (1957;1965) proposed a new theory of grammar i.e., transformational generative grammar (TG). He argued that language acquisition/ learning does not take place by mere imitation but by creativity on the part of the learner. The native speaker of a language is born with an innate biological propensity to acquire and use language. Chomsky (1959) further argues that the native speaker internalizes the grammar of his language in spite of the limited linguistic data he is exposed to. This intuitive knowledge of the native speaker is described as 'Competence'. Similarly the nativists believe that a child learns much more than what is available from the environment alone. Thus according to the nativists view not only language input but also the learner's innate ability plays a major role in language acquisition. The interactionists emphasize that interaction plays a vital role in second language acquisition. According to Wells (1981), language learning occurs when the interlocutor modifies the input to the child. The interlocutor attempts to provide feedback to the child depending on the response s/he gets from the child. Wells further says that the child learns during the course of interaction from his interlocutor.

Interactionists believe that when an adult interacts with a child s/he modifies his language (Known as baby talk or motherese.) this kind of modification promotes second language acquisition. According to interactionist view language acquisition takes place when the interlocutor modifies the input to the child and provides feedback to the child's response. From the above discussion it is evident that the language environment plays a crucial role in the process of language learning. Behaviourists believe that the child learns the language through imitation of the language input which is available in the environment. According to the nativists, the child possesses an innate ability to acquire language. Thus, it is not only the environment but also the innate ability of the child that enables language acquisition. Interactionists believe that language acquisition takes place in the course of interaction between the child and the interlocutor, thus facilitating language acquisition. This makes evident that input plays a significant role in language acquisition. What is more significant is that input which is modified during the process of interaction facilitates language acquisition. Therefore it can be said that the modified input provided by the teacher to the learners is a necessary condition for second language acquisition. It can also be concluded that interaction generates modified input which facilitates second language acquisition.

Input and second language acquisition:

Second language acquisition research has established that input plays a significant role in the learning of a language. Researchers have claimed that the input is a necessary condition for language learning. It is believed that the child picks up the language provided in the environment. Therefore there is an argument which says, the input which is modified based on the current competence level of the learner is significant.

Role of input in natural language teaching:

According to the interactionists view, language acquisition is promoted by the modified language input available through caretaker's speech as well as by the Child's interaction with his interlocutors. Input thus modified, leads to further modification and provides feedback on the child's developing language. Theories of language learning discussed above reveal that language input, the learner's innate ability and modifies language input pro

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vided through interaction play a crucial role in language acquisition. Research on second language acquisition has shown that the most beneficial language environment is one where the language is used naturally for communication. Though some aspects of language need conscious study the acquisition of the basics of a language is best accomplished in contexts where the learning is focused on understanding or expressing an idea or a message. Acquisition of a language is treated as the natural outcome of learner's active participation in a communicative situation where the target language is in use. This happens because interaction generates more input and provides feedback which gives the learner opportunities to test his hypothesis about the language.

Conclusion:

This shows that, the classroom forms the major source of language learning. Therefore linguistic input to the learners is very crucial. Research has shown that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition. It has also been proved that input can be made comprehensible through interaction. In the process of interaction the learners make requests for clarification confirmation and repetition of L2 utterances. Such adjustments make the input comprehensible. Therefore it may be said that interaction plays a crucial role in making the input comprehensible.

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