

English as Second Language Learning and Psychological Obstacles

Hiren Trivedi

Assistant Professor

C. & S. H. Desai Arts & L. K. L. Doshi

Commerce College,

Balasinor, Gujarat, India.

Email: heerblue@yahoo.com

Abstract

Understanding the psychological process of teaching learning is essential as it can also mould the psyche of the children in specific way. At the same time, understanding students' psychology is a dire requirement of the time. With the advancement of different sciences and theories and technological means, the teachers have attempted to view the students and their study material with different aspects and angles. Since the beginning of the 20th century, psychologists have attempted to understand the students' psyche and their process of learning. Behaviorist psychology, cognitive psychology and more recently humanistic psychology have tried to understand the language learning process and gave different approaches to teach language. However, the general observance of all these psychologies is that the major problem of learning a second language is the problem of overcoming the pull of the mother tongue. Hence, learning and the knowledge of the first language becomes hindrance in the syntax pattern and pronunciation of the second language. So, one can conclude that the beginners of English language learning should not be taught the language through the use of the first language. Instead, they should be introduced second language directly. Moreover, the most important requirement for success in second language acquisition is motivation which is also a psychological need.

Key Words

First Language, Learner, Obstacles, Psychology, Second Language.

Citation: TrivediHiren. English as Second Language Learning and Psychological Obstacles. *Ganpat University Journal of Applied Research In Social Sciences & Humanities*, 5 (1 & 2),(2016): 74-78.

Introduction:

'Education without burden' is the motto of national education policy of recent times and also a major goal of the most of the institutes. It clearly emphasizes on the education that can make child free from psychological and physical burden. We have turned towards such a policy because in recent past, too much educational stress on the psyche of children brought adverse and unexpected results. Many students left the study or committed suicide under the pressure of getting good score or becoming eligible for admission in specific institutions. So, understanding students' psychology was a dire requirement of the time. Moreover, understanding the psychological process of teaching learning is equally important as it can also mould the psyche of the children in specific way. The researches and the developments in psychology have helped to improve the teaching of languages and sciences. The task of teaching a language, therefore, has been systematized with the knowledge of psychology of learning that the world possesses. Every activity under the aegis of the programme of teaching a language is tempered with the findings of psychology with a view to making the learning process a smooth and effortless phenomenon. For the same reason, the teacher training programmes are taking into consideration the role of psychology on the part of the teacher to improve his professional competence. Before we discuss the psychology of the students and obstacles in learning the second language, it would be better to see different types of psychological theories and their approaches.

Various Psychological Theories:

Since the beginning of the 20th century, psychologists have attempted to understand the students' psyche and their process of learning. Behaviorist psychology, cognitive psychology and more recently humanistic psychology have tried to understand the language learning process and gave different approaches to teach language. One of the renowned American linguist and psychologist, Chomsky claims that children are biologically programmed for language learning and the language develops in the child in the same way that other biological functions develop. He believes the environment makes only a basic contribution - it makes people available for the child to speak to. The child's biological endowment will do the rest.

According to the Cognitive, the mind is the sole source of human knowledge. Mother tongue acquisition is one of the major events in the psychological maturation of the human child. Every child is born with inbuilt language – learning mechanism. The child plays an active role in learning a language, and is not a passive recipient of socially accepted language patterns. What the child imitates is not a photographic reproduction but an artistic re-creation. Learning a language is not memorizing an infinite number of

sentences but a creative process of learning a finite set of rules that enables one to form sentences of one's own. While learning a language, the child constructs her own grammar and sentence pattern which she keeps testing all the time while using the language. As the acquaintance with the language grows, she rejects the wrong uses and keeps the right ones. Thus, it is a process of moving from a small circle of language usage to a large one.

Neurofunctional Theory argues that language function and neural anatomy are closely connected. According to them, the brain is divided into two areas, the right and the left hemispheres. The former is related to comprehension and the latter to production. Scientists have also proved that language learning is associated with a particular area of the brain, called the *speech centre*. This centre receives and stores impressions from the sensory organs and sends out impulses to the motor organs. One of the popular theories on the origin of language, the Gesture Theory rests on the belief that language originated in the vocal noises is accompanied with the gestures of hands, the eyes and the face muscles which man uses for communication. The advocates of this theory firmly believe that the body parts used for gestures are closely connected with the specific part of the brain. In the course of the evolutions of different theories and beliefs, recently developed, the humanistic psychology has succeeded to free the classroom from traditional teaching-learning process and more importantly to make the students active in the classroom. And the teaching learning of the first and the second language run mostly under the influence of this theory in the present time.

Understanding Students' Psychology:

I have observed in course of my teaching experience that the students (both of schools and colleges) who are occupied with the proficiency of the language participate more in the classroom discussion than those who do not have the hold of the language, particularly of English. The former put questions to the teachers and ask suggestions and advices more confidently than the latter. I am not uncertain to say that knowing language and using it make the students more confident, extrovert and communicative. On the contrary, not knowing English language make them shy, introvert, diffident and meager. As S. R. Sharma views, "Language is a social act, a means of adjustment to and control over other people. The entire process of socialization is largely a process of language development. In the second place, command of language is an important factor in the development of the total personality of the child. Command of language gives a feeling of confidence, satisfaction and security in meeting many life situations."¹ Hence, learning a language not only boost the child's personal traits but also help them to learn other subjects confidently or vice versa.

Psychological Obstacles in Learning the Second Language:

When a child learns his first language, he begins, as it were, with a clean slate. As he acquires the language, its forms, meanings and their associations get impressed on his mind, and they become a part of his reflex actions. Whenever he is in need of expressing a meaning, he uses the appropriate forms without any conscious thought. Since he knows only one language, he cannot but use it when the occasion arises. But, when one jumps from the first language to the second language learning, there remains a chance of confusion and collision of two languages.

One of the major problems of learning a second language is the problem of overcoming the pull of the mother tongue. We can notice our pupils' mispronunciation due to the influence of their mother-tongue sounds. We can also observe their mistakes in spelling and syntax due to the previous knowledge of their mother tongue in their writing. For an instance, in Gujarat (or in any other state), in the very earlier period of their schooling, students are taught the second language (English) with the help of the first language (Gujarati or any other regional language). Moreover, when they are taught the second language, they are taught to spell according to their regional names. For an instance, they are practiced to spell *k* as *ka*, *b* as *ba*, *ir* as *ri*, *i* as *chi*, and so on. In the same way in later stage, they are taught to memorize the spelling of *k* as *ketan*, *w* as *Bharat*, *r* as *Ritesh*, and *i* as *Chintan* and so on and so forth. After acquiring the skill of spelling formation in such pattern, students confront a psychological dilemma when they have to spell English words such as cat, bat, character, recess and many more. They would wrongly spell such words as *ket* or *ce* instead of cat, *be* instead of bat, *kerektar* or *cherectar* instead of character, *rices* or *rishesh* instead of recess. Their previous learning becomes an obstacle when they have to use English correctly. Instead of spelling the words correctly, their previous knowledge forces them to spell these words wrongly.

Learning and the knowledge of the first language also becomes hindrance in the syntax pattern and pronunciation of the second language. As T. C. Baruah observes, "When he begins to learn a second language, the situation is quite different. He has not only learnt how this verbal signaling system works but has also acquired a particular system (i.e. his mother tongue) which he can use with ease. Therefore, whenever he wants to express something in the second language, he has to keep the habits of the first language in check in order to produce the new sounds and structures."² This is a difficult task, because it is human nature to follow the path of least resistance. Further, his ears have become so accustomed to the mother-tongue sounds that he does not easily hear the difference between the sounds of the two languages and as a result cannot produce

the distinctive sounds of the second language. This compels him to replace the sounds of the second language with the similar sounds of his mother tongue. The same is the case with the syntactic structures. His conscious attempt at arranging words into syntactic patterns results in literal translation, and when the patterning in the two languages differs, he produces ungrammatical structures. This tendency to replace the sounds and structures of the second language with those of the mother tongue is known as 'the pull of the mother tongue'. In psychological terms this phenomenon is known as *Transfer*. In learning the first language the child has already acquired a set of linguistic habits. So, when using the second language, he will have the tendency to transfer the speech habits of the first language to the second language. This transfer may be either positive or negative. In those matters in which the two languages do not differ, the habits of the first language will help in the learning of the sound. This is called *positive transfer*. But in the areas where the two languages differ, the effect will be the opposite. Here, the learner will have to overcome the pull of his mother tongue in order to produce the sounds and the structures of the second language. This is called *negative transfer*. In the areas of language learning where habits play the predominant role, the force of such interference is maximum. In the case of pronunciation, the 'pull' is so great that it is almost impossible for a second language learner to acquire the pronunciation of the native speakers of the language.

Conclusion:

So, it is recommended that the beginners of English language learning should not be taught the language through the use of the first language. Instead, they should be introduced second language directly. It can make the children to learn the unknown language more easily and there would be less psychological conflicts in the minds of the students. Moreover, the most important requirement for success in second language acquisition is motivation which is also a psychological need. After all, teaching learning process is about opening a brain within the four walls of the classroom. Fear of the second language is itself a great obstacle which should be removed first with regular positive boosters. Until the student writes, speaks and reads the second language correctly, the teacher's task is incomplete.

Works Cited:

- Baruah, T. C. *The English Teacher's Handbook*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 2005.
- Sharma, S. R. *Communication Skills in English*. Jaipur: Mark Publishers, 2006.