APPLYING REINFORCEMENT AS A TECHNIQUE TO TEACH SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE TO THELEARNERS OF ENGLISH AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

English language has gained much attention all over the world as it is an enriching and popular language throughout the world. But till now, Indian students have been finding difficulty to learn English and also to acquire language skills. This paper will elucidate with examplethe practice of reinforcement techniques in a second language classroom forteaching Simple Present tense to the first year Undergraduate students who learnEnglish as their second language (ESL).This paper also tries to expound the methodology of using some of the reinforcement techniques and analyses the results emerged from the target students.

Key words: reinforcement, reinforcer, behaviourism, operant conditioning

Introduction

Language is an important tool in the process of sharing ideas, emotions and feelings. It is a natural means of communication which involves understanding and sharing of one's own thought to a person or a group. Braj Mohan in his work *Let's play English: Activites for Language Teaching* mentions "Language is a symbolic system in which spoken or written words are used as codes whose meaning is based on the shared understanding of society" (5). English is considered to be an international language. S.C. Sood in his *New Directions in English Language and Literature Teaching in India* elucidates that "English is the language of banking, commerce and industry, and a link language among the educated people in the country" (7). Thus, the teaching and learning of English becomes an important aspect in every one's life. Reinforcement is a technique of stimulation which is used as a tool to enhance the skills in English of the ESL learners. This paper focuses on applying reinforcement techniques for I UG students to teach Simple Present Tense.

Present Situation of ELT in India

In India, English serves as a common administrative language which leads to the thirst for English among students, workers, administrators and even educators. S.C. Sood discusses this as "The role of English in administration, banking, commerce and industry results in increasing demand for English education" (7). This also results in the teaching of English in India for the learners both in schools and colleges. After Independence, the role of English in India gradually increases and now, in almost every sphere of life in India English plays a dominant role. In current scenario, as mentioned by Namita Roy Chaudhury, "English has been given the position of third language in the curriculum" (5). Thus, the teaching of English finds a position in the development of human knowledge and communication for Indian people.

Reinforcement

The process of learning a language involves learning theories. There are various types of learning theories – Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Constructivism. Behaviourism is the process of learning which takes placethrough association, consequences and observation. By associating the stimuli and responses, the behaviour of learner can be changed, is the objective of this theory. It comprises of 3 sub-categories namely:

1) Classical Conditioning
2) Operant Conditioning
3) Observational learning

Operant Conditioning includes a technique called reinforcement. Reinforcement is a technique in which a reward is given for the learner as a token of encouragement to practise or dismiss a behaviour. S.P.K. Jena in *Behaviour Theory: Techniques, Research and Applications* cites "Reinforcement plays a vital role in strengthening and maintaining most of our behaviour in day-to-day life" (55). It emerges from the experiments of B.F. Skinner. There are two types of Reinforcement:

1) Positive Reinforcement
2) Negative Reinforcement

The technique in which a behaviour is repeated habitually is known as Positive Reinforcement. Negative Reinforcement is nothing but reinforcing the students to achieve a particular desired behaviour in order to remove anunwanted behaviour in the learners. S.P.K Jena states "The kind of consequences which increase the rate of a response are positive or negative depending on whether they reinforce when they appear or disappear" (56).

Reinforcer

Rewards stand as the reinforcer in the process of reinforcement. There are two types of reinforcer – Primary or unconditional and secondary or conditional reinforcer. S.P.K. Jena defines 'Primary Reinforcer' as "Certain standard things such as food, drinks, rest or warmth act as reinforcers, because they have been doing so in the past by satisfying some basic needs. These are called unconditional (primary) reinforcers (S^R)" (57). Jena also defines 'secondary reinforcer' as "Conditional (secondary) reinforcers (S^r) are learned (e.g. attention, praise, tokens, money or a gift" (57). There are various reinforcers such as

- ❖ Verbal encouragement (by saying 'Very good', 'Keep it up', 'Extraordinary', etc.)
- ❖ Giving objects as rewards such as chocolates, box, pen, books, gifts, etc.
- ❖ Physical encouragement that is, encouraging the student by asking their classmates to clap, etc.
- ❖ Reward points
- ❖ Bonus points/marks in class tests or internals.

Some of the above mentioned reinforces were used to reinforce the students while teaching simple present tense.

Methodology

The students of I B.Com 'A' of St. Joseph's college were considered for the experiment. A total of 50 students were taken into account. In the beginning of the class, students were extrinsically motivated to come for a special class in the afternoon. Among 50 students only 15 students intrinsically motivated themselves and came to the class. The students in the afternoon session were the experimental group whereas the students in the General English class in the morning were the controlled group. Both the groups were taught the Simple Present Tense and the data collected were analysed.

The experimental group was first asked to write a paragraph on the given topics such as 'Demonetisation', 'Mission 2020' and 'About Myself'. They were unable to write on these topics using Simple Present Tense and they used past tense for their habitual actions. But a very fewstudents wrote them correctly. They were reinforced to do the same by providing chocolates and also by claps from their classmates. Then, on the next day of the class, students were able to reproduce the correct usage of simple present tense orally one by one. Students were given grade points for their correct usage of simple present tense. They were taught the different forms of using simple present tense like 'he/she/it – verb+s' and 'I, we, you, they – verb'. The students were asked to use English frequently inside the class while talking with their friends. The students were reinforced to talk in English by giving 3 marks for those who use English frequently in their conversartion in their component test. On the final day, students were asked to write a paragraph on their habitual actions. Most of them were able to write it correctly and the remaining students were able to write it with some mistakes. A diagnostic test and a summative test were conducted. The results were analysed.

The controlled group was not reinforced by such rewards like chocolates, marks and reward points. Their results were not positive like the experimental group.

Performance of the Experimental group

S.No.	Name of the Students	Marks scored in Pre-test	Marks scored in Post-test
1.	MariyaSusai	2	6
2.	S. Rengaprasad	7	10
3.	Kannan	4	8
4.	A.G. Arockiaraj	4	7
5.	S. Kishore Prasaanth	3	7
6.	R. Teenuraja	8	10
7.	P. Aravindhasamy	5	8
8.	R. Dharnish	4	7
9.	A. Dinesh Kumar	2	5
10.	K. Naveen	5	9
11.	M. Dinesh	3	5
12.	S. Abishek	5	7
13.	Karan	4	8
14.	P. Sam Ebinazer	3	6
15.	M. Sree Subbaraman	8	10

Data Analysis

Calculation:

Formula for Mean (X)$= \dfrac{\sum x}{n}$

Mean of Pre-test marks $(X_1) = \dfrac{2+7+4+4+3+8+5+4+2+5+3+5+4+3+8}{15} = \dfrac{67}{15} = 4.47$

Mean of Post-test marks $(X_2) = \dfrac{6+10+8+7+7+10+8+7+5+9+5+7+8+6+10}{15} = \dfrac{113}{15} = 7.53$

Thus, $X_2 > X_1$, i.e., the mean of Post-test marks (X_2) is greater than the mean of Pre-test (X_1).

Conclusion

The use of reinforcement technique which has been extracted from behaviourist theory has its own impact on the students while learning simple present tense. This paper also provides necessary information on understanding reinforcement, reinforcers and demonstrates the use of reinforcement in enhancing students' ability in learning Simple Present tense from the data collected from a small group of students.

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