

Second language acquisition in childhood

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Abstract

An effective language skill is certainly an advantage for an individual. Nevertheless, the fluency in native language, ability to communicate in second language is becoming more and more inevitable to face the ceaseless demand for human resources in globalised world and also serves as a medium to encounter with various cultures. The ideal occasion to introduce the second language is childhood because various scientifically proven results shows that children posses greater capability to imbibe language than adults. This paper canvasses about the successful acquisition of second language in childhood through the inculcation of appropriate language teaching methods.

Key words: second language, acquisition, teaching methods, children, inculcation.

1.Introduction

Childhood is the prolific period to learn new things. Children tend to acquire language by observing the ambience. The crucial period for a language acquisition is childhood, where children are prepared inborn to imbibe not only the habits but also the language. There are enormous methods to develop a second language. With regard to children, language learning strategies vary from adult language learning strategies. The motif of this paper is to magnify that second language acquisition in childhood is comparatively successful than the language that is acquired in adulthood.

2.Hitherto Methods in Second Language Teaching

Language teaching methods are dynamic throughout the history. Philologist and language preceptors of both classical and contemporary age aware of the fact that second language acquisition in childhood bring forth better proficiency in target language. The current methods in language teachings are not new, it traces back to the classical language teaching methods. A brief historical overview on language teaching methodologies aids to have a comprehensive idea on how languages were learnt and taught to children. In fact, they are the guiding principles for language teachers.

Centuries before during the middle ages (15th-16th century), Latin grammar schools framed curriculum for teaching a language. Renaissance in Europe displaced Latin with English, French and Italian as the languages of spoken and written communication. But still children who were taught modern languages (English, French, Italian) in grammar schools, during 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, were given heavy-handed introduction to Latin grammar and were often met with brutal punishments. Despite modern languages began to rule the curriculum of European schools, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM – teaching language through Latin grammar) was the ruling method in language teaching between 1840s and 1940s.

Reformist found it so artificial and inappropriate. Towards the late 19th century Reform movement challenged Grammar Translation Method by introducing various innovative language teaching methods, which made ingenious results in language acquisition. The leading exponents C. Marcel, Prendergast, F. Gouin who were the initial reformist tried to quench the thirst for new approaches in language teaching. C. Marcel's reference to child language is an archetype for language teaching techniques. T. Prendergast proposed the first structured syllabus on how language occurs. F. Gouin is regarded to be the best for developing an approach, based on children's use of language. His ideas were the predominant seeds to the oncoming method called Direct Method.

The ideas of individual reformists failed to receive widespread attention, but the latter reformers, applied linguists Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Vieter, Paul Passy provided greater credibility and acceptance to the initial reformists. They emphasized on speech and phonetic training to the beginners, led to the remarkable foundation called phonetics, the scientific analysis and the description of the sound system of language. This was significantly an initial natural approach, ultimately led to the formation of Direct Method (Natural Method).

The twentieth century encountered with abundant innovative methods and approaches in language teaching that might because of the tremendous scientific development. An increasing attention to the naturalistic approach in language learning fused with all the upcoming methods. The renowned methods and approaches of twentieth century were the audio-lingual method, total physical response, the silent way, multiple intelligence, the lexical approach, communicative language teaching approach, the natural approach, co-operative language learning approach and so on.

Thus language teaching methods are getting modified day by day to meet the challenges in educational linguistic sector.

3. Suitable methodologies to acquire second language in children

The above evolutionary data on language teaching divulges how target languages were learnt and taught. All those ideally formatted methods and approaches can be applied in accordance with learner's competence. But in regard to children, language acquisition is not performed methodically. As stated earlier,

Children develop language skills rapidly, and they quickly grasp what they listen to. This statement cannot be practicable for all the children because of distinctive cognitive skills. Bilingualism is the foremost advisable method to develop second language in children. The best time to teach children second language is the same time they are learning their first language. Many researchers acclaim that children need not to be admitted in formal language classes to learn a second language.

Many children grow up hearing and using more than one language. Children of bilingual parents tend to learn target language swiftly because of the repetition of words, sounds of the language. Children of monolingual parents also can learn second language but they need some external factors to encourage them. The earlier children are introduced to a second language, the easier it will become to develop it. The appropriate way for the children to learn a new language is to make them hear people who speak second language eloquently. This is for to pick up the natural accent of second language. Unlike other language learning methods, bilingual method does not need any class room methodology. It focuses more on casual learning rather than implementing formal set of instructions. Whatsoever, it is commonly experienced that bilingual children's mother tongue dominates the second language. Only acquisition can be achieved in children using bilingual method. In order to attain language proficiency, formal instructions have to be presumed by the learner.

In addition to bilingualism, another significant method in second language acquisition is the natural approach. This approach was together provided by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in 1983. They wanted second language acquisition to be acquired only by naturalistic principles. Their ideas were similar to that of direct method but they differed in their characteristics. Krashen's theory on second language acquisition propounds five major hypotheses. He emphasized on natural communication- in which speakers are concerned not with the form of utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. In similar way children can be introduced to the target language.

There are various ongoing methods to easily inculcate second language to children. They are technological methods, where there is no need for an instructor. Digital learning methods such as mobile learning, gamification, embodied learning, trans-languaging are the emerging language teaching methods. Children are readily accessible with digital learning because of its fascinating characteristics.

4. Conclusion

Thus the second language is being acquired in childhood by different innovative methods. Almost all the linguists begin their language teaching theories in association with children's cognitive intelligence. They mark a subtle difference between language acquisition and language proficiency. Language can be acquired handily in childhood, but it takes efficiency to attain proficiency only if the learner has sheer determination, diligence and persistence.

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