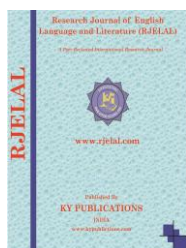**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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THE THEORIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COGNITIVISM IN DEVELOPING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Language is the central and core skill of humans' life and day-to-day communication, without it no course of action will take place. Learning a language is mainly focused on four important skills that everybody knows well. Moreover the language acquisition theories and cognitive psychological aspects also play vital role in language learning. The goal of second language teaching can be achieved by suitable methods and approaches. The impact of teaching methods is a body of techniques that any language teacher adapts in the classroom teaching-learning milieu to put across the language matter effectively. A look into the history of language teaching reveals a long way of nourishment through many innovative methods and approaches in teaching of a second or foreign language. In such a context none can ascertain a particular method or approach which is appropriate to language learning. Similarly this article aims at viewing the second language acquisition and cognitive theories to create a better exposure to second language L2 learning.

Key words: L2 acquisition, brain based language acquisition, cognitivism, methods, approach

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the key factors to measure the growth of humans' knowledge and society. Without a language it is impossible to think about a society around the world. Language may diverge from country to country or within a nation, hence every language stands forward to link with any language and conveys the significance of it. Besides, language creates a platform to show up one's experience and experiments in the form of writing or speaking. In relevant to this, A.L. Kohli appropriately remarks:

Language is Man's significant possession. We cannot imagine a society without it. From birth to death we are surrounded by language. It is the means of communication, a means of social control. No society can function without it. Nor is it possible to think without language. When we think of anything, we give shape to our thinking with the help of language (17).

Learning a foreign language gives more challenges on various contexts to the learners. A range of methods and approaches is often used to teach a L2, and a variety of classroom management techniques is employed to create learning opportunities. Moreover second language acquisition has been actively studied from a cognitive psychological perspective for the last two or three decades, and researchers within this tradition share basic goals towards L2 learning.

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The present article attempts to bring an overview of L2 acquisition theories in line with cognitivism. In the current epoch, education plays vital roles in revolutionizing the human society, and takes it to a novel phase, where modernity plays vital roles in every aspect of its move. In view of this, Verma rightly states:

> Language is central to the whole process of education and the principal means of cultural transmission. It is also a very explosive tool and hence needs to be handled with care and understanding. In the growth of human beings as social beings, language has a very important role to play (9).

According to his view no accomplishment can be done without language in any society or field. Teaching a second or foreign language can no more be accomplished by typical chalk and talk method. In the recent days, language teaching has adopted new trends and pedagogies. Every now and then there have been additions to language teaching milieu. The real challenge for educators today is getting learners to carry over their classroom learning from controlled practice to spontaneous real-life use of it. Digitalization has made it possible as it connects learners with the outside world. Jack C. Richards suitably comments:

> Language teaching is hence a complex issue, encompassing sociocultural linguistic, psycholinguistic, as well as curricula and instructional dimensions. Planning a successful language program involves consideration of factors that go beyond the mere content and presentation of teaching materials (11).

LANGUAGE ACQUISITIONS

It is a belief that the language acquisition theories play vital role in the development of the child's language learning process. The actuality of learning language requires self efforts, because before children going to school they begin to use language, even in the primary level also it is not possible to use any language acquisition wholly. In this connection, George Yule aptly says:

What is acquisition 'capacity' then requires is a sufficiently constant input from which the basis of the regularities in the particular language can be worked out. In this view, the child is seen as actively acquiring the language by working out the regularities in what is heard and then applying those regularities in what he or she says (176).

In the generative tradition, the study of language acquisition is of great importance for linguistic theory. There are two principal reasons for such a role, first there is the assumption that the language faculty is innate which is central to generative linguistics and which obviously has to reflect in the properties of language development in the child and the second is the notion of 'explanatory adequacy' which should oblige any theoretical linguist to show that his or her proposal for an analysis of a particular structure can be learnt.

Teaching and learning of any language is a kind of experience, which gives knowledge exposure. Nowadays everything is revolutionized and changed, and teaching and learning become technology based deeds. All the existing approaches and methods are really useful individually. However their application is not an easy job. It summons for involving creative and expressive abilities in a teacher. The materials required need to be structured, planned and prepared well for an effective second language teaching.

The learners should know the difference between language acquisition and language learning. Regarding this issue George Yule appropriately opines: "The term 'acquisition', when used of language, refers to the gradual development of a language by using it naturally in communicative situation. The term 'learning', however, applies to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language"(191). Although both play a role in developing second-language competence, acquisition is far more important, since the competence developed through it, is responsible for generating language and thus takes for language fluency.

Even though a person who has a strong knowledge in grammar and vocabulary he may fail

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to communicate in oral. On the other hand a person who is good at speaking in a language who may fail to communicate in written. Learning is a primary deed which has to be developed in terms of good acquisition practice, but it is not possibly gain the proficiency of natives. George Yule rightly observes:

> Those whose L1 experience is primarily a learning one tend not to develop the proficiency of those who have and an acquiring experience. However, even in ideal acquisition, very few adults seem to reach native-like proficiency in using a second language. There are individuals who can achieve great expertise in writing, but not in speaking (191).

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Second language acquisition is a very broad and rich area that covers many sub-topics, including the different approaches to SLA, interlanguage studies, L2 learning and individual differences in acquisition. The barriers of learning second language are due to mother tongue domination, the people who begin to learn L2 during teenage and adult years, they have less second language speaking opportunities. In relevant to this George Yule states, "Some obvious reasons for the problems experienced in L2 acquisition are related to the fact that most attempt to learn to learn another language during their teenage or adult years" (190).

Stephen Krashen is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing theories of language acquisition and development. Much of his research has involved the study of non-English and bilingual language acquisition. His second language acquisition theories made a great impact during 1980s. It is interesting to watch how a child learns a language. Many theories have been put forward to explain this process of learning such as Hereditary Theory, Environment Theory Language Acquisition Theory etc., but none of these theories seems to unravel the enigma of the learning process satisfactorily, though experiments in the field of psychology and Linguistics in this regard continue to take place. It is now believed that a second language can also be acquired like the mother tongue,

provided favourable conditions for acquiring it is created for the learners.

Since 1970 several experiments in the field of SLA have been conducted involving adults and children learning second languages. Experts like Krashen, Dulay, Burt and Terrell have had convincing evidences to show that a second language can be acquired like the mother tongue, if similar conditions are provided in the classrooms. The SLA experiments have put forward the following hypotheses in support of the theory.

Following the above said statement, the hypothesis states that an adult has two distinct ways of learning a second language, viz. sub-coconscious acquisition and conscious learning and these two ways are interrelated in a definite manner. Of these two acquisitions seem to be more important and it requires meaningful interaction in the language concerned, when the learner's attention is not on form but on the message conveyed or received. Having learned the difference between acquisition and learning, a few hypotheses is taken from Krashen's second language acquisition theories. They are;

(1) The Natural order Hypothesis states the grammatical structures are acquired (not learned) in a particular order; certain structures are acquired early while certain others are acquired late. This hypothesis helps in the sequencing of language items in the syllabus for teaching and preparing textbooks.

(2) The Monitor Hypothesis states that the conscious learning in adults helps in a certain mechanism called monitor or editor, which checks and makes the necessary grammatical correction in the acquirer's utterances, whenever necessary. It cannot create utterances, but only corrects them when necessary and almost like a spelling and grammar checker in a word processor in a computer.

(3) The input hypothesis states that in order to be understood, what the teacher presents in the class should be comprehensible to the learners and

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challenging enough. It is important to note that acquisition is possible only if the learner comprehends what is said to him; so the teacher in a SL class should make sure that the language presented is understandable.

(4) The Affective – filter Hypothesis states that learners acquire language only when they are willing to acquire. Learning situation is emphasized for the betterment of the learners, moreover experts in this field also advised much over this. These theories are only possible when the teachers use them all properly in the language class.

COGNITIVE THEORIES IN L2 LEARNING

Cognitivism is a learning theory that focuses on the process involved in learning rather than on the observed behaviour. As opposed to behaviorists, cognitivists do not require an outward exhibition of learning, but focus more on the internal processes and connections that take place during learning. The learner is viewed as an information processor. Knowledge can be seen as schema or symbolic mental constructions and learning is defined as change in a learner's schemata. The linguistic theories have often generally assumed that language is learned separately from cognitive skills and operates according to the principles that differ from the most learned behaviors. This assumption is represented in the analyses of unique language properties such as developmental language order, grammar, knowledge of language structures, social and contextual influences on language use, and the distinction between language acquisition and language learning.

In cognitive psychology, mental processing plays a central role in all learning and is the basic mediating variable for influences on learning that are external to the learner, such as task characteristics and complexity, or internal influences such as developmental level, ability or motivation. Cognitive theories try to get inside the mind of the child and to propose the types of mental structures and thinking processes that may be taking place. It is

an argument that the child cannot move on to learning a new language skill until he or she is intellectually ready for the next stage. This theory was the most forcefully presented one by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. He argued that the child has to have a certain psychological capacity or cognitive ability before s/he can learn particular aspects of using language in order to make themselves understood. Piaget views language acquisition within the context of the child's broader intellectual development. Piaget (1972) stressed the importance of individual cognitive development as a solitary act. He stated that the acquisition of the language cannot be as straight forward as being solely reliant on a developing intellect – if it were, then the sixteen-year-old should learn the new language more easily.

As it can be seen, opposite to innatism, which focuses on the first language acquisition, cognitivism, by its own nature, also aims its efforts at explaining the second language acquisition (these theorists called it "acquisition", but nowadays in this area of L2 the term "learning" is more appropriate). A cognitive theory sees the second language learning as a conscious and reasoned thinking process, involving the deliberate use of learning strategies. Learning strategies are special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning or retention of information. This explanation of language learning strongly contrasts with the behaviorist account of language learning, which sees language learning as an unconscious, automatic process.

Learning a language involves more than knowing what form it takes: it involves knowing how it functions too. According to Widdowson referring what is distinctive about it (linguistics) is that it uses the abstracting potential of language to categorize and explain language itself. Language may be considered from different though complementary points of view: the study of language itself and the human ability to acquire it and to use it in concrete situations. Both aspects should be borne in mind by L2 teachers if they are to help learners in their process of acquiring new languages.

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BRAIN-BASED LINGUISTIC ACQUISITION

When we use language we try to categorize the world around us by assigning a term to a concept. In the same way, when one hears a word, one tends to project one's own patterns of reality in order to have a mental image of it. Things are classified in linguistics in much the same way as everywhere else, that is, on the basis of similarity. As adults, people link features of the language with familiar features of their world, with what is established in their minds as a normal pattern of reality or schema. In other words, we tend to organize our knowledge using the conceptual categories and structures we already have, basing ourselves on similarity and depending on the world around us. Context is a schematic construct that is represented in the mind. So the achievement of pragmatic meaning is a matter of matching up the linguistic elements of the code with the schematic elements of the context. And this holds for all language learning, whether it is the mother tongue, or other second languages.

The traditional distinction between linguistic competence and performance, i.e. between the speakers, or hearers, knowledge of a language and their ability to use it in concrete situations, is a highly cognitive ability. We may say that cognition is in the domain of experience, dependent on the physical apparatus of the brain, where abstraction can be considered the result of mental operations on which it is experienced; linguistic concepts, and words, are abstractions. Meaning includes associative links between words and objects and experiences that result in the formation of concepts (Johnson-Laird, 1986). The theory of neural instantiation, explained by Jackend off (2002), holds that the data structures and the processes that store and assemble them are realized in the brain. Thus according to the same author, linguistic structures are functional characterizations that require neural instantiation, although little is known yet about how neurons actually instantiate such language details.

On the other hand, the essence of cognition appears to rely on mechanisms of memory. Now we know that our memory is based on neural connections of the hippocampus area of the brain. Caramazza and Miozzo stated that the way words stored in long-term memory is activated in the course of sentence perception and production is another area of concern still under study. In a near future, linguists will surely profit from such findings. Along this line, recent studies on brain-based learning. Try to facilitate the way in which people learn and store information, by using activities that help activate the several memory lanes in which the brain stores information.

According to Van Patten's (1996) studies, learners' attention is first directed towards meaning; therefore they are initially driven to process content words before anything else. Looking for semantic information, they prefer to process lexical items to grammatical ones (Van Patten 21), but learners should also be taught to process grammatical items so as to develop positive strategies that may increase their level of accuracy in their interpretation of new items. Overgeneralization of mother tongue rules applied to target language material and to semantic features may result in the wrong interpretation of the word. The tendency to over generalize is not exclusive to language, but it certainly comes to the fore in dealing with linguistic phenomena that we, the language teachers, meet every day. Piaget's theory helps explain the order in which certain aspects of language are acquired.

APPROACH, METHODS, AND TECHNIQUE

An approach to teaching of English refers to the theoretical views about the nature of language (English), and those of language learning. Anthony's words are aptly cited by Richards and Rodgers S, correctly opine: "An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught..." (19). The Structural Approach, for example, views language as a bundle of structures and learning a language as similar to learning any skills such as swimming; the Grammar Translation Approach, on the other hand, views language as a set of rules and views learning as getting the meaning of the target language through the use of the learner's mother tongue. Approaches as

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mentioned above differ in their basic principles, which are influenced by the changes in the source or parent disciplines such as Linguistics, Psychology, and Education etc.

A method stems from the approach and refers to the overall teaching activities happening in the classroom; more than one method may stem from an approach, depending on the situation in which it is used and the needs of the learners or the practising teacher's ingenuity. Jack C. Richards and S. Rodgers appropriately quote the words of Anthony in their work: "Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. Within one approach, there can be many methods..." (19). A method of ELT involves the selection of suitable activities for teaching, their gradation, presentation and practice in the class; it may involve informal evolution of the learner's performance too.

Techniques are everyday classroom activities and procedures that enable the learners to learn. The teacher's use of teaching aids, use of nursery rhymes, asking questions, demonstrating, using drills for practice can be cited as examples of teaching techniques. Jack C. Richards and S. Rodgers rightly cited the words of Anthony, which states: "A technique is implentational- that actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well" (19). Some techniques are prompted by the method whereas some techniques are common across more than one method; for example, use of teaching aids is not restricted to one particular method; use of word to word translation is a technique used in the Grammar Translation Method only.

Though these terms – approach, method, technique – refer to different processes, some experts prefer to use approach and method interchangeably; method and technique interchangeably too. In the present epoch, there are many methods and approaches which have been followed, and moreover many a research is going on. Due to the growth of science and technology, there have been many changes which occurred in language teaching, and education as well, which brought novel ideas and thoughts, motivated the researchers to do new project and research in language teaching and learning. Jack C. Richards and S. Rodgers aptly state:

> Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century. The whole foundation of contemporary language teaching was developed during the early part of the twentieth century, as applied linguists and others... Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterized by frequent change and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies. Much of the impetus for change in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods (1).

CONCLUSION

Language teaching is a challenge in the past, but now it becomes an easy process, yet there are some barriers make teaching language hard. Now-a-days most of the institutions have been providing syllabi only based on the language content and no curriculum is framed based on teaching methods and approaches. On the other hand, the language teachers handle the classes without the right choice of the method/approach. The methods and cognitive theories are interlinked together. Language learning is not like learning subjects like History, Physics etc., it needs more attendance and self efforts. In tune to this, Julia Myers and Cathy Burne state: "Language provides the means of accessing, developing and recording information in all subjects and other subjects provide meaningful contexts for developing knowledge" (127). The researcher hopes that this study will provide certain suggestions for better teaching and learning of a second language in the offing years.

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