

RAISING AWARENESS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The article deals with the analysis of the peculiarities of second language acquisition and second language learning. It considers theoretical background of second language acquisition. The possibilities of applying classroom second language acquisition theory and research findings by future English language teachers in Ukrainian schools are investigated.

Key words: *second language acquisition, second language learning, first (native) language, second (foreign) language, future English language teachers, L2 teachers, comprehensible input.*

Introduction. Second language acquisition (SLA) denotes to the ways in which any learner, a child or adult learns a second language. Second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person's first language. Though the concept is named second-language acquisition, it also refers to the learning of third, fourth, or subsequent languages. SLA has emerged as a field of study primarily from within linguistics and psychology as a result of efforts to answer three basic questions: What exactly does the L2 learner come to know? How does the learner acquire this knowledge? Why are some learners more successful than others? Different considerations about SLA are made on the part of those involved in language pedagogy. While curriculum developers and materials writers are interested in providing optimal sequencing orders for acquisition, teachers are concerned with pedagogic tasks which best facilitate acquisition in the classroom [1].

Aim of the publication is to outline the range of key issues requiring constructive considerations by future English language teachers for implementing second language acquisition practices in their classrooms.

Discussion. In the world practice Second Language Acquisition has been recognised as a discipline for barely 50 years. This is a field that has had a considerable impact on language teaching in recent years. For many language teachers, second language acquisition is synonymous with S. Krashen whose work contains strong claims of relevance to pedagogy. His ‘input hypothesis’ and ‘monitor model’, allied to his views on learners’ errors are presented widely in print and on television, to mass audiences. According to him, we acquire language when we understand what people tell us and what we read. There is no need for deliberate memorization; rather, firm knowledge of grammatical rules (a feel for correctness) and a large vocabulary gradually emerge as language acquirers get more ‘comprehensible input’, aural or written language that is understood [3].

Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. Error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition, but caretakers and native speakers can modify their utterances addressed to acquirers to help them understand, and these modifications are thought to help the acquisition process. Acquirers need not have a conscious awareness of the ‘rules’ they possess, and may self-correct only on the basis of a ‘feel’ for grammaticality.

Conscious language learning, on the other hand, is thought to be helped a great deal by error correction and the presentation of explicit rules. Error correction it is maintained, helps the learner come to the correct mental representation of the linguistic generalization.

One major strand of SLA research is that which has focused on similarities and differences between input and interaction inside and outside of the classroom. It has been observed that there are clear differences in both classroom and naturalistic settings in terms of patterns of interaction, language functions, types of teacher questions and so on. There is evidence, that instructed learners develop their skills

much more quickly than uninstructed learners and end up being much more proficient than those who do not receive formal instruction [4].

Informal environments, when they promote real language use (communication) are not conducive to acquisition, while the formal environment has the potential for encouraging both acquisition and learning. The classroom has a definite role and value in encouraging second language acquisition, it should be viewed as a place where the student can get the input he or she needs for acquisition. The classroom may be superior to the outside world for beginning and low intermediate students, in that the real world is often quite unwilling to provide such students with comprehensible input. The best language lessons may be those in which real communication takes place, in which an acquirer understands what the speaker is trying to say. Similarly, a reading passage is appropriate for a student if he or she understands the message. Finally, the teacher-talk that surrounds the exercises may be far more valuable than the exercise itself. We teach language best when we use it for what it was designed for: communication [3].

Teachers need to understand why certain things work or don't work in classrooms. That's why 'theory' may provide a part of the answer to some of the questions future English language teachers should have learnt to ask. Prospective teachers need to know how language is acquired. A knowledge of language acquisition theory helps to justify methodology. So it is important to decide how and in what measure to refer to Second Language Acquisition in teacher education programmes.

The issues which classroom SLA research seeks to address are the following: types of classroom organisation and grouping patterns which facilitate second language development; task and activity types which facilitate acquisition; the characteristics of teacher talk (including questions, amount, error feedback, instructions, directions) and the implications of this talk for acquisition; the effect of formal instruction on the rate and/or route of acquisition; affective variables which correlate with second language achievement; type of input which facilitates

comprehension and, by implication, acquisition; interactional modifications which facilitate comprehension and, by implication, acquisition [5].

Even though observations of natural learning may not always translate directly into classroom practice, there is no question that findings from SLA research can do much to enhance teachers' understanding of second-language acquisition. With enhanced understanding, teachers can make more informed decisions and build upon, rather than work against, learners' natural inclinations.

There are six areas in which SLA (and SL teaching) research findings have had or could have impact on teachers' awareness: comprehensible input, focus on form, correction of speaking errors, pronunciation, speech act sets, learning strategies and factors influencing language learners [2].

Comprehensible Input. A hypothesis that has had an impact on language teaching is that learners move most rapidly toward mastery of a language by acquiring it through comprehensible input. This hypothesis states that more comprehensible input results in more language acquisition, that language teaching methods containing more comprehensible input are more effective, and that language development occurs more effectively without formal instruction focusing on conscious learning. The message to language teachers has been that rather than attempting to teach the numerous structures of the language, they should focus more on making the language available to the learners for them to acquire forms that are salient to them at their current level of language development.

Focus on Form. More traditional language teaching methods have often put a premium on drilling of grammatical forms as a way of teaching them to learners. A position supported by SLA theory is that learners should be led to notice grammatical features in the input, compare what they have noticed with what they produce in their current interlanguage, and then eventually integrate the new features into their interlanguage when they are ready. Another approach consistent with SLA findings is one that recognizes that all language units have three dimensions (form, meaning, and use) and that it is the teacher's task to systematically focus upon only one of these dimensions at a time, shifting the focus as the needs of the learners change.

Correction of Speaking Errors. The correction of oral errors will probably have limited or no effect if learners: (1) are not focused on the form of their message (i.e., its vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation), (2) do not have enough time to consider the correction, (3) do not have adequate knowledge of the area being corrected to benefit from the correction, (4) have too little knowledge about how the language works to know what question to ask to get clarification or do not have adequate proficiency to understand the teacher's explanation of what they did wrong. A more general SLA finding has contributed to increasing teacher tolerance for learner errors. Where it was once thought that errors should be prevented at all cost, it is now understood that error commission is part of the learning process. As such, teacher correction needs to be judicious. This could mean, for example, correcting when the learners are ready for the corrections and have adequate knowledge about the structures involved, or when they have time to digest the corrections. Another pedagogical implication would be that activities should have a clear intent: accuracy or fluency.

Pronunciation. The SLA literature has had some impact on the way in which teachers relate to pronunciation accuracy in the classroom. Researchers have come to find that the accuracy of pronunciation varies when learners are asked to perform different tasks. The reality of the classroom is that a lot more is going on than instruction in the phonetics of the language. As in the case of grammar, students may actually exhibit control of sounds in practice situations in the classroom, just as they can exhibit what appears to be control of grammatical structures. Then in actual communicative situations when they are not focusing on the forms and not monitoring for correctness, their control seems to break down.

Speech Act Sets. These are understood as the major semantic formulas, any one or combination of which would suffice to represent the particular speech act. SLA research has helped to provide empirical descriptions of speech acts such as requests, compliments, apologies, complaints, refusals, and expressions of gratitude; it has provided an opportunity for teachers and textbook writers to move from general, intuitively-based materials to more specific, empirically-based ones, which

take into account variation resulting from differing levels of formality, severity of the incident, setting and interlocutors, and numerous other variables. The best that teachers can hope to achieve in the classroom is to create among learners a level of residual awareness so that they will be less prone to commit pragmatic failure both as producers and receivers of speech act behaviour, and come to approximate native behaviour more rapidly.

Learner Strategies and Factors Influencing Language Learners. Of all the contributions of SLA research to language pedagogy, one of the greatest has been the significance it has ascribed to the learning process. From the initiation of SLA research, investigators have been interested in the strategies learners make use of to acquire an L2. Early on, it was recognized that learners invoked strategies such as inferencing, hypothesis formation and testing, and using formulaic speech (first as routines and later as more analysed patterns). Whereas at one time research on learner characteristics primarily dealt with aptitude, attitudes and motivation, SLA research has also investigated personality factors, cognitive styles, hemispheric specialization, memory, interests, prior experience, birth order, etc. While no specific pedagogical techniques can be prescribed based on the evidence that has been cited thus far, the very fact that there is such variety among learners should underscore the need for teachers to see students as individuals and to work in a way as to take into consideration the diversity of backgrounds in their classes. Second-language teachers must always innovate to some extent. No one syllabus or set of materials ever fits a group of learners exactly. As a result, second-language teachers themselves are always engaged in a process of research on second-language acquisition. That is, teachers themselves need to be able to identify what it is that particular students and groups of students know of the L2 in order to decide how to proceed next. In that process of needs assessment, L2 teachers can be aided by concepts and tools, contributed by SLA theories and research [2].

Conclusion. SLA research has made learners and learning central, and in some ways has thus contributed to a shift in focus from how teachers teach to how and what learners learn. Yet while the focus on learners and learning is important, it

is not one that always offers straightforward answers to teachers. Certain pedagogical practices that have been a direct or indirect result of SLA research are outlined. With regard to comprehensible input, negotiation for meaning may be important which itself is a complex matter that includes not only a focus on grammatical form but on meaning and on appropriate language use as well. In terms of correction of speaking errors it is likely to take place if learners have to be ready for the corrections, have to have adequate knowledge about what is being corrected, and have to have ample time to digest the corrections. As for pronunciation, accuracy may vary by task, possibly with poorer pronunciation resulting in situations where the learner is focusing more on conveying meanings than the correct sounds. The correct realization of speech act sets appears to be a real challenge for the learner, though an awareness of the variables involved may help the learner to gain more successful speech act comprehension and production. Learner strategies are important as they encourage learners to help themselves, thus allowing teachers to assume a role of facilitator. Also, SLA research has helped to establish the real need to take into account the level of diversity among students [2]. So, knowledge of SLA research findings helps to inform future English language teachers' decisions, even if these findings are not directly applicable to the classroom.

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ПОВЫШЕНИЕ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТИ БУДУЩИХ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА О ПРОЦЕССАХ УСВОЕНИЯ И ОБУЧЕНИЯ ВТОРОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

В статье проанализированы особенности процессов усвоения и обучения второму языку. Автор рассматривает теоретические основы процесса усвоения второго языка; исследует возможности применения теории и результатов исследований в области усвоения второго языка будущими учителями английского языка на практике.

Ключевые слова: процесс усвоения второго языка, процесс обучения второму языку, первый (родной) язык, второй (иностраннй) язык, будущие учителя английского языка, учителя второго иностранного языка.

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ПІДВИЩЕННЯ ОБІЗНАНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ПРО ПРОЦЕСИ НАБУТТЯ ТА НАВЧАННЯ ДРУГОЇ МОВИ

У статті проаналізовано особливості процесів набуття та навчання другої мови. Розглянуто теоретичні основи процесу набуття другої мови. Автор досліджує можливості застосування теоретичних положень та результатів досліджень у галузі набуття другої мови майбутніми вчителями англійської мови на практиці.

Ключові слова: процес набуття другої мови, процес навчання другої мови, перша (рідна) мова, друга (іноземна) мова, майбутні вчителі англійської мови, вчителі другої (іноземної) мови.