

# FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ACQUISITION OF LITERACY

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An issue how a child acquires his/her native language has been studied for a long time by researchers. Behaviouristic approach to that issue is as follows (Littlewood, pp.5):

- 1 . The child imitates the sounds and patterns which he hears around him.
- 2 . People recognize the child's attempts as being similar to the adult models and reinforce (reward) the sounds, by approval to some other desirable reaction.
- 3 . In order to obtain more of these rewards, the child repeats the sounds and patterns, so that these become habits.
- 4 . In this way the child's verbal behaviour is conditioned (or 'shaped')until the habits coincide with the adult models.

A child learns language in a process of habit formation. Although this behaviouristic theory about child's first language acquisition is not enough to explain about child's first language acquisition, the habit formation process play an important role. Within the behaviouristic points of view, environment around child is crucial for language acquisition. A role of caretakers is very important. A child imitates and repeat caretaker's speech, and exposure to the language which a caretaker utters stimulates innate language process of a child.

Slobin says that 'the child must make use of parental input to discover the UNDERLYING, UNSPOKEN regularities of this language'(Slobin, pp.105). In the process of first language acquisition, a child 'must listen for meaningful elements in adult speech, and he must understand how such elements are mapped onto his understanding of the world'(Slobin, pp.107). During a child listens to mother's speech, repeats it, and imitates it, he constructs rules for generating words. That's why a child utters words which he has never heard of, and sometimes he overgeneralizes rules (e.g. \*goed, \*mouses).

Language learning is distinguished from language acquisition. According to Krashen, 'acquisition is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, while 'learning' is a conscious process that results in 'knowing about language''. For example, Japanese students 'learn' English in their classrooms in Japan not 'acquire' English, Krashen says that 'people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input 'in''.

People need to be exposed to second language rich environment. Second language in a radio, on TV, and literature should be easily accessible for them. Since to be comprehensible

is important, input which is difficult for them to understand, or is not familiar to them, seems to be less effectible. Input should be comprehensible, meaningful, and purposeful.

For second language acquisition, low affective filter is also important. The 'affective filter' is 'a mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input'(Kra-shen). When acquirers are free from fear of making mistakes or free from feeling whether they look stupid, their affective filter is low.

When we compare adult L2 acquisition with child L1 acquisition, there seem to be much difference. When a child acquires first language, he is in natural and real environment where adults talks with him in that language. A child needs to produce language for real communication. For example, he may say 'Mommy milk', when he is hungry. Through imitating his caretaker's correct utterances (usually caretakers utter simple, and grammatical language to a child), he constructs rules to produce grammatical and correct language.

As to the adult second language acquisition, it seems to be difficult for adults to be exposed to L2 environment unconsciously. Adults tend to 'learn' L2. Settings for adults to acquire second language are mainly in classrooms. It is very difficult for instructors to provide students with those meaningful, purposeful, functional settings.

There is also a similarity between them. A child develops first language acquisition through interacting with adults, and caretakers. It's desirable for adults to interact with native speakers and to be exposed to the same environment as that of first language acquisition. That is, an adult should be in a meaningful and real environment where he needs real communication. The goal of language learning is communicating with others.

Teachers and caretakers want children to develop their literacy, 'for various purposes, so that as adults they will be able to participate fully in the economic, political, social, and cultural life of their communities and nations' (Weaver, pp.31). As we see from a book of *Learning with Zachary* by Laminack, children acquire literacy in a print rich and risk free environment. Laminack reads stories aloud to Zachary regularly, answers his responses to stories positively, and encourages him to take risks. Providing children with many good literature at hand and caretaker's positive attitude toward a child are very important for developing literacy.

From my experience, schools in Japan seem to neglect students' acquisition of literacy. In English classes in Japan, what a teacher emphasizes on is teaching grammatical things and memorizing. The students spend most time on translating word-by-word into Japanese in English classes. When a students can't translate some sentences because he doesn't look up unknown words in a dictionary beforehand, he is blamed as lazy student. I had never been encouraged to guess meaning of an unfamiliar word from the context when I was a student. Students' routine preparation for English class seems to be meaningless. Students look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary without taking the context into consideration.

There are many researches which support that 'reading and writing of authentic texts, develop both language acquisition and acquisition of literacy'. In the journal of *using "real" books: Research Findings on Literature Based Reading Instruction* by Tunnell and Jacobs, interesting studies are reported. Cohen compared 130 students in 2nd grade 'who were taught with basal readers' with 155 students who were taught by using "real" books, literature, 'along with regular instruction'. The group of children who were in an experimental situation 'showed

significant increases over control group on Metropolitan achievement Tests and A Free Association Vocabulary Test'.

Recently, many instructors highly value reading and writing of authentic texts and literature-based reading and writing, and a lot of studies supporting for those principles have appeared. Fostering children's acquisition of literacy, a teacher should provide students with print-rich environment. Exposure to various kinds of literature and magazines helps students to get interested in reading, and eventually it promotes their literacy. Meaningful and purposeful reading and writing really promotes their literacy.

### Bibliography

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