

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: LITERATURE REVIEW

Ali Alsudais

Teaching Assistant of English Subjects, Almajmaah University, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT: *English nowadays is becoming a second language in many countries over the world. This paper tries to provide a description of the concept English language teaching and learning. The paper reviews different methodologies of teaching English in the education system.*

KEYWORDS: English, Method, Learning, Teaching

INTRODUCTION

The core objective of this review is to provide a critical evaluation of the role played by methodologies in the educational system. It is important to consider these methods, to comprehend their impact on enhancing the process of second language learning and teaching (Schmidt, 1990). Relevant insights of the different techniques provide second-language teachers with a good overview of their own position as related to educational matters and classroom practice (Krashen, 2004). In addition, this aspect enables them to recognise the stages of how a second language is acquired, since, in recent years, the respective domain has significantly developed (Ibid., 2003). The use of native language is essentially not the critical feature that slows down a person's capacity to attain other languages (Schmidt, 1994). In this context, it is important to note that Firth and Wagner (1997) insist on the use of a more situated view of second language acquisition. This can help learners understand the importance of contextual factors in acquiring a new language. What is interesting in the debate initiated by researchers (Hall, 1997; Krashen, 2004; Schmidt, 1994) is that the process of acquiring a second language is associated with the dominant role of language-related cognitive systems, which also raises the issue of challenging basic concepts pertinent to the learner. In support of the arguments provided by Firth and Wagner (1997), Hall (1997) brings new insights into the social-psychological debate on second language acquisition. The way in which Hall's perspective is different lies in the new perceptions of systemic use of the language to demonstrate what is learned during a particular period. From this new perspective, the learning process is examined through the prism of systemic knowledge and learners' ability to use the respective target language.

Second Language Learning

Language Acquisition

The process of acquiring a second language, or commonly referred to as L2 acquisition, is the practice by which individuals learn a second language (Krashen, 2003). The term of second language acquirement (SLA) is also the methodical sphere aimed at examining that practice. The respective subject constitutes a sub-branch of practical linguistics, but is also related to other subjects, particularly in the fields of education and psychology (Oxford and Anderson, 1995). A central aspect emphasised while researching second language acquisition is Multilanguage, the reflection that the respective language is basically not the result of

variations between the languages which individuals already recognise and the language which is the subject of their acquisition (Krashen, 1989). Instead, the above-mentioned term refers to a unique educational system in its own provision and with its own systematic principles, and reinforces the idea that this interlanguage steadily grows as learners persistently use that language (Schmidt, 1990). Nevertheless, languages which students are familiar with might demonstrate a considerable influence on the practice of acquiring a new language (Krashen, 2003). This influence is theorised as language transfer (Schmidt, 1990). The key factor driving language attainment emerges as the specific language contribution which learners demonstrate (Krashen, 2003). It has been acknowledged that students become more competent the longer they are exposed to the target language and the more efforts they put in free and voluntary reading (Oxford and Anderson, 1995). Consequently, it has been argued that contribution and input are all is needed for learning acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). On the other hand, additional approaches, such as the interaction theory and the understandable output hypothesis, have recommended that prospects for extensive interaction may also be needed for students to reach more sophisticated levels of comprehension (Schmidt, 1994). Research on how precisely students attain a new language varies, depending on certain cultural, social and economic factors (Krashen, 2004; Riding and Cheema, 1991; Robinson, 2011). Cognitive techniques of SLA emphasise certain occurrences in one's brain that strengthen language acquisition: for instance, paying more attention to language may influence the capability to acquire that language, and the way in which language attainment is connected to different types of memory should be assessed (Schmidt, 1990). Socio-cultural methods disregard the concept that second-language acquisition is uniquely identified as a psychological dimension and aim to enlighten it in its socio-cultural setting (Krashen, 1989). Various key social elements which affect the process of learning a new language are related to the precise level of engagement, associations with the respective learning community, as well as with gender issues (Schmidt, 1990). To underpin and describe SLA, linguistic methodologies consider language exclusively from different knowledge domains and attempt to utilise findings of extensive studies of linguistics (Robinson, 2011).

The Acquisition-Learning Distinction

Language attainment does not require broad utilisation of strong grammatical rules and does not need tedious instruments. Language attainment requires extended communications in the specific language - natural interaction - in which speakers are concerned not with the structure of their expression but with the messages which they are transmitting and understand. Well-known for his theories of language attainment and development, Stephen Krashen is a US-based professor of linguistics at the University of Southern California (Krashen, 1989). Much of his existing research has integrated the studies of non-English and bilingual language attainment. As a result, a more unified approach can be applied in the process of acquiring a second language. During the past two decades, he has published over 100 books and delivered over 300 lectures at academic institutions throughout the United States and Canada. According to Krashen, students who are learning in a formal, form-focused manner will 'learn' the language but never completely attain it. In his view, acquisition, which is the foundation for all L1 proficiency, comprises of regulations and principles which need to be taken into consideration to reach L1 level. By contrast, learnt language can only be considered as an 'advanced level' to what has been referred to as L2 (ibid., 2004). He argues that the advanced/monitor level refers to further claims that learnt insight can never become acquired knowledge. Krashen's theory has thus been considered as a 'dual competence' theory. Moreover, Krashen states that the attainment process can be used in the un-naturalistic

environment of the classroom. The bottom line of the arguments provided by Krashen (1989) is that students attain (as opposed to learn) when they can recognise something (principally through framework) or little above their current level of knowledge. There is no clear focus on types such as, for instance, ‘advanced, sophisticated or perfect’ (which measures only ‘learning’), but new language is added into expression, which contains both new and native language. Krashen (ibid.) thus identifies this ‘understandable input’, while his opponents consider it as an ‘incomprehensible contribution’ (Riding and Cheema, 1991; Robinson, 2001; Schmidt, 1994). The most important aspect is that learning should be perceived from a multidimensional perspective, to ensure the application of relevant principles. Krashen’s theories have provided many approaches which highlight how learners’ acquisition is made easier. According to Krashen (2003), learners’ ‘emotional filter’ should be kept minimal, which means that their treatment of input should be kept as effective as possible. To this end, Krashen (ibid.) believes that learners should be as comfortable and relaxed as possible, so that productivity should not be strained in any way. Learners will thus generate knowledge when they are equipped with proper tools. A high level of mistake adjustment also appears as being negative for maintaining the emotional filter low. On a daily basis, a learner who is too focused on correcting mistakes will eventually choose to just remain quiet. Error adjustment may be acceptable in the learning process, though it should be avoided if acquisition is the core objective of the learner. As a result, Krashen (2004) does not consider the classroom to be the environment where a second language can be effectively attained. Instead, he indicates that, in the classroom, teachers should provide students with opportunities of real-life interactions and situations where language attainment is more anticipated to take place. Therefore, the Monitor theory focuses on the connection between acquisition and learning, and outlines the influence of the acquisition-learning distinction. The monitoring function can be achieved by learning grammatical frameworks. According to Krashen (1989), the acquisition framework is the expression initiator, while the learning framework performs the function of the ‘monitor’ or the ‘advanced level editor’. The ‘monitor’ operates a planning, editing and correction function when three specific drivers are met: the second-language pupil has adequate time which facilitates the process of learning and ultimately enables an understanding of additional frameworks or reflections on progress. Conversely, the Natural Order theory is based on theoretical findings which demonstrate that the acquisition of grammatical frameworks pursues a ‘natural order’, namely, which is naturally expected. According to this view, students can acquire grammatical insight earlier than expected, but this depends on a learner’s age, overall capability, L1 knowledge, and extended communication. There is no sufficient data available to identify the significance of the Natural Order hypothesis on language acquirement (Truscott, 1999). However, Krashen (1989) indicates that the outcome of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language curriculum should be based on grammatical insight; in fact, he rejects grammatical frameworks when the core objective is language acquisition. The Input theory can be seen as Krashen’s endeavour to describe how the pupil attains a second language. In other words, this theory is Krashen’s rationalisation of how second-language attainment takes place. Therefore, the Input theory advances the idea of only focusing on ‘acquisition’, and not on ‘learning’ (Krashen, 2003). According to this theory, the pupil enhances and develops along the ‘natural order/grammatical insight’ when a particular stage of language fluency is reached. Ultimately, the fifth theory, the Emotional Filter theory, represents Krashen’s observation that a number of emotional variables play a collaborative and informal role in second language attainment. These characteristics include: commitment, adequate motivation, and extensive anxiety. Krashen (2004) thus argues that students with higher commitment, self-confidence, a good personality and insufficient anxiety are better organised to experience success in second-language attainment.

Formal and Informal Language

Learning Formal language structure implies that the teaching practice takes place within a context, typically the school, namely, a fixed location/place with a fixed timetable, operating according to set objectives, with various but restrictive techniques, supported by limited resources, and foreseeing assessments and examinations. In other words, this type of action is controlled, organised, structured, and is supposed to provide feedback on formal learning. The issue is that learning processes occur only if and when tutors plan and enact them (Truscott, 1996). The main benefits of formal teaching are that a teacher's professionalism, decision-making skills, set objectives and recognitions often lead to positive results. The drawbacks are that students' learning times are always diverse and that college activities may often be not only worthless for students, but also and too disconnected from their real life. Informal practice means that the learning process occurs involuntarily, inadvertently, unintentionally and unsurprisingly, anywhere and at any time without any technique, by various resources, alone or in collaboration with others (Schmidt, 1990). The informal process results from daily-life interaction related to workplace, family or leisure. It is not controlled or structured in terms of acquisition objectives, learning time or proper documents, and does not naturally lead to academic certification. Informal practice may be deliberate, yet in most cases it is accidental or 'casual'/ incidental. A typical formal learning setting is the classroom, even though there are many other external surroundings, while real informal conditions may include bars, theatres, houses, museums, or a playing field, among others. Currently, the most common informal learning place is the Internet in the form of blogging, social networking sites, forums and chats, for instance (Robinson, 2001). The Internet-led informal learning practice allows students to integrate new cognitive skills through: strengthening iconic representation and spatial visualisation. Yet, there are limitations in cognitive processes, such as: theoretical vocabulary, mindfulness, reflection, inductive decision making, critical judgment and imagination. Thus, it is important to discuss relevant learning strategies that can provide adequate insights into the input expected by second language learners.

Learning Strategies

According to Krashen (2003), there are four terms which are typically used in the literature to describe language learning strategies: Transfer, Interference, Overgeneralisation, and Simplification. The phrases are developed in a set of pairs based on their relationship (ibid.).

Transfer

Research shows that positive transfer occurs when the existing knowledge benefits from the learning instructions/tasks, that is, when a prior item is correctly used in the current subject matter (Keefe and Ferrell, 1990). The positive transfer can be measured as transfer, which is a general term that explains the carryover of previous insight or knowledge to successive learning, e.g.: L1: German, L2: English.

Interference

By contrast, negative transfer occurs when the prior performance obstructs the practice on a second task (Schmidt, 1990). The negative transfer can be measured to as interference, e.g.: L1: German, L2: English.

Overgeneralisation

The term has been utilised to refer to a method in second-language attainment in which the L2 pupil acts like a target language (Krashen, 1989) and also uses a special rule or item in the L2 beyond formal boundaries.

Simplification

It is a term employed with reference to second language attainment. Evocative learning is generalisation, which is a practice of storing items so that a few higher order characteristics lead to an increasing number of lower-order traits. Research (e.g. (Keefe and Ferrell, 1990) has demonstrated that simplification and generalisation have the same meanings, but simplification can be distinguished by complexification, that is, the act of determining many learning parts of the whole. However, in certain instances, complexification is required to neutralise a tendency either to simplify or to over-generalise to such an extent that crucial parts of the whole are excluded.

TEACHING METHODS

The Grammar-Translation Approach

This method was traditionally exploited in teaching ancient Greek and Latin languages (Robinson, 2001). The technique has been generalised to integrate modern languages. Classes are taking place in the pupil's native language, with little active utilisation of the language intended for learning. The use of vocabulary takes place in the form of limited word lists (Kolb, 1984). In addition, teachers tend to provide adequate explanations of grammar rules and how they are applied in practice (Krashen, 2004). Grammar guidance offers rules for incorporating words together; therefore, guidance frequently places an emphasis on the form and variation of words. Reading complicated texts is initiated early in the syllabus. Yet, little consideration is given to the content of syllabus, which is assessed by exercises in grammatical examination (Krashen, 2003). The only practice is exercises which mainly consist of tasks to translate disconnected words from one language into a second one (Schmidt, 1990). Furthermore, little or no consideration is given to pronunciation (Krashen, 2003).

The Direct Approach

This methodology was initially established as a response to the grammar-translation method, in an attempt to incorporate more utilisation of the second language in guidance/ syllabus instructions (Schmidt, 1994). Lessons normally start with a conversation by using a modern informal expression in the language intended for acquisition (Krashen, 2003). Materials are initially discussed verbally and employ measures or pictures (Robinson, 2001). The native language is never used and translation is forbidden (Kolb, 1984). The exercise contains various questions related to the conversation or a subjective narrative, and questions are typically introduced in the intended language (Kolb, 1984). Verbs are initiated and methodically connected with sentences only if students are becoming fluent in the target language. Advanced students are required to interpret literature for additional insight and pleasure (Robinson, 2001). Fictional texts are not explored grammatically. Teachers also provide adequate links to the culture associated with the target language (Krashen, 1989). Culture is measured as an important trait of learning the language.

The Cognitive Approach

This method is integrated for practical and educational reasons, as it has been made clear in various studies on the topic (Schmidt, 1990). The technique is intended for individuals who do not travel overseas as well as for those who identify reading as a means of evaluating proficiency in a foreign language (Robinson, 2001). The priority in learning the target language is identified as reading proficiency, while the second important aspect is the historical insight into the cultural background linked with the respective language (Hayes and Allinson, 1996). Only those recognised with sufficient grammar expertise are required to become proficient in reading, understanding, and fluency. However, insignificant attention has been paid to the acquisition of formal/informal skills in the specific language (Schmidt, 1990). The terminology of the early reading texts is strictly monitored to reduce complexity. Vocabulary is extended as rapidly as possible, since the attainment of vocabulary rather than grammatical proficiency is measured more critically (Harley and Hart, 1997). In this technique, translation re-emerges as a respectable classroom practice to better understand the written text.

The Communicative Method

Communicative skills are the progressive attainment of the ability to utilise a language to accomplish one's communicative objectives. Communicative skills involve the collaboration between two or more individuals sharing the same representational system. Communicative skills apply to both oral and written language. They are based on the context and situation, the role of tutors, students, learning styles and instructional techniques (Schmidt, 1994). For instance, the distinction of language used by individuals in different professions or occupations can be presented in formal or informal ways (Harley and Hart, 1997). Therefore, educators consider the use of jargon expressions which may be inappropriate to the objectives of second language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990). Communicative skills require L2 students to become fluent in the creation and understanding of communicative acts or verbal acts.

CONCLUSION

Second language learning strategies, teaching methods, specific measures, behaviour and standards enable the pupil to efficiently learn the second language. Moreover, teachers are obliged to exploit teaching strategies to assist L2 learners in the learning/acquisition process. Since attributes such as age, gender, personal qualities, motivation, determination, life experience, learning approach, excitement, and anxiety, for instance, manipulate the system in which language students learn the foreign language, it may be irrelevant to assert that all students employ the same effective language learning techniques or should be taught to utilise and expand the same methods to become successful learners (Krashen, 2004). As discussed in the above, future studies of language learning strategies and training methods should progress beyond descriptive frameworks, as the basic goal is to search for answers to various appropriate questions, such as those related to determining the most effective and reliable second language acquisition methodologies (Robinson, 2001). More specifically, the following questions should be addressed: Can the learning and acquisition process be easily accomplished between second language and foreign language contexts? What is the purpose of language acquisition in language learning techniques and training frameworks? Does it take sufficient time to teach specific students in certain language learning/acquisition methodologies? Since it is also important to evaluate and determine the success of specific language learning techniques

(Krashen, 2003), are certain learning approaches learned more easily in formal or informal contexts? It can be argued that those educators who provide comprehensive answers to this set of questions will influence the way in which a new theory would be established, which would strengthen the existing L2 / FL practice (Kolb, 1984). In conclusion, tutors working with second language students must consider the students' language, in addition to their cultural and academic requirements, as well as the levels of language skills. Teachers should encourage their students to experiment with language rather than induce a feeling of being frightened of making errors. Errors are part of the knowledge process, just as error improvement is part of the teaching process. Teachers should not disregard errors, since focusing too much on them can create anxiety and fear and obstruct learning.

REFERENCES

- Firth, A. and Wagner, J. (1997). 'On Discourse, Communication, and (Some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA Research'. *Modern Language Journal*, 81(3), pp. 285-300.
- Hall, J. K. (1997). 'A Consideration of SLA as a Theory of Practice: A Response to Firth and Wagner'. *Modern Language Journal*, 81(3), pp. 301-306
- Harley, B. and Hart, D. (1997). 'Language Aptitude and Second Language Proficiency in Classroom Learners of Different Starting Ages'. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(3), pp. 379-400.
- Hayes, J. and Allinson, C. W. (1996). 'The Implications of Learning Styles for Training and Development: A Discussion of the Matching Hypothesis'. *British Journal of Management*, 7(1), pp. 63-73.
- Keefe, J. W. and Ferrell, B. G. (1990). 'Developing a Defensible Learning Style Paradigm'. *Educational Leadership*, 48(2), pp. 57-61.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Learning Style Inventory*. Boston: McBer.
- Krashen, S. (1989). 'We Acquire Vocabulary and Spelling by Reading: Additional Evidence for the Input Hypothesis'. *Modern Language Journal*, 73(4), pp. 440-464.
- Krashen, S. (2003). *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*. Portsmouth: Heinemann
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The Power of Reading*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Oxford, R. L. and Anderson, N. J. (1995). 'A Cross cultural View of Learning Styles'. *Language Teaching*, 28(4), pp. 201-215.
- Riding, R. and Cheema, I. (1991). 'Cognitive Styles-An Overview and Integration'. *Educational Psychology*, 11(3/4), pp. 193-215.
- Robinson, P., ed. (2001). *Cognition and Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). 'The Role of Consciousness in Second Language Learning'. *Applied Linguistics*, 11, pp. 129-158.
- Schmidt, R. (1994). 'Deconstructing Consciousness: In Search of Useful Definitions for Applied Linguistics'. *AILA Review*, 11, pp. 11-26.
- Truscott, J. (1999). 'What's Wrong with Oral Grammar Correction?' *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 55(4), pp. 437-456.