UNIT 3   LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

STRUCTURE

3.0 INTRODUCTION

A lot can be learnt about how to teach language in the classroom if we carefully study the processes of how we acquire language in our home environments. This unit will discuss the relationship between language learning and language teaching, in detail.

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This unit begins by asking the basic question: How do children acquire a language? It will ask this question for languages that children acquire at home i.e. their first languages. It will then discuss how processes of developing competence in second languages must be similar to 'acquisition' processes. It will also provide evidence to counter the claim that most mistakes in second language are due to first language interference. This unit will end with the various approaches and methods of teaching of second languages that have been used over time as well as the need to adopt a method which approximates a child's natural processes of language acquisition.

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

How do children acquire their first language(s)?

1. What is the relationship between first language acquisition and second language learning?

2. How should language be taught in a classroom?

3.2 FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

A girl called Genie was admitted to the children's hospital in the state of California in 1970. She was 13 at that time and had been confined to a small room, since she was 20 months old. During her confinement, she had been either tied to her potty chair or kept in a home-made sleeping bag, in a crib covered with wire mesh. She had no access to TV or radio and her only human contact was her mother, who used to get her food. The reason for this situation was her father, who was intolerant to sound and would beat her up every time if she made any. When Genie was found, she was without speech and even years after being exposed to language in a normal home environment has not been able to produce fully grammatical sentences.

Sandhya was 20 years old when she had a car accident. She suffered a head injury in which the left side of her brain was damaged. As a result, Sandhya's speech got severely affected. When asked about what she had for breakfast she said- *mein poha khaa aur pii doodh.*

Homna is my friend's four and a half year old grand daughter. She was born in Delhi and the languages spoken at her home include Hindi, English, Panjabi and Mandyali (a language spoken in Himachal Pradesh). She is comfortable in listening to all these languages at the same time and also interacts with their speakers in the way she can. She was two and a half year old when she shifted to South India, more precisely Bangalore, Karnataka. As a result she also started

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listening to a lot of Kannada and Tamil. Today, she talks to her maid exclusively and fluently in Tamil, while nobody at home understands any bit of their dialogue. She sings bits of Tamil and Kannada songs flawlessly and often uses these languages with her friends. She is at the same time a fluent speaker of Hindi and English.

What do the above true-life situations tell us about how we acquire language? Do we simply pick up a language because we hear it all around us or does our biology have any role to play in this acquisition? Sandhya, Genie and Homna provide evidence for a bit of both. Sandhya's ability to speak gets affected when she suffers a brain injury and Genie picks up no speech when she is exposed to none. Homna, on the other hand, learns more than one language, which she is exposed to in her caregiving home environment. Like Homna, most children pick up more than one language, spoken in their home environment with no explicit teaching and with what seems like effortless ease. Our biology provides us with immense potential for acquiring language(s) as long as our environment provides us with the required exposure to them. It is thus, meaningless to ask whether language is inborn or learnt. Both nature and nurture have a role to play in its acquisition.

In the first unit, we have discussed how difficult and complex the structure of language is. Still, by the time a child is 3-4 years old, she is able to comprehend the grammar of not only one but 2-3 languages. This clearly shows that human beings are born with an innate ability to acquire language and all children come to school with this innate ability. It is very important for every person working with education, to appreciate this. It is also very important to understand that this ability will not blossom if it does not get a language-rich and affection-filled environment.

Check Your Progress-1

1. Wh*y does the child say " mein poha khaa aur pii doodh"?*

    a) as the left side of her head has been injured

    b) as she did not get a language rich environment.

    c) as she was not given practice in speaking

    d) as she had not been able to acquire the language

2. *How many languages did you learn from your home environment in your childhood?*

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3. *How many languages do the children in your school speak in their home environments?*

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4. *What are the two things that we must keep in mind while providing a learning environment for language?*

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5. *Talk to a four-year old child. Write down 20 sentences spoken by her. Can she tell you what she wants? Can she tell you what she does not want? Can she tell you what she likes or dislikes? Can she ask you questions? Can she ask you for something?*

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3.2.1 THE BIOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF THE HUMAN BODY FOR LANGUAGE

Human beings are biologically adapted for language. This essentially means that human beings can produce sounds and hear and build meaning out of these sounds as various parts of their body have been adapted to help in this process.

Talking

To speak, we let the air move from our lungs, through the windpipe and then let it pass through different parts of the vocal tract to finally reach the mouth to produce all kinds of sounds; sometimes air passes through our nose as well. While each one of the organs mentioned above is involved in speech production they also perform other essential functions. The tongue is specialized for taste, teeth for eating, lips for sucking and the lungs, wind pipe, mouth and nose are involved in breathing. However, unlike primates like monkeys, chimpanzees, gorillas etc., who are our closest biological relatives, in humans each of these parts has been adapted for speech.

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While speaking, our lungs help in regulating our breathing rhythm and it gets adapted to allow us to speak for long periods, without being out of breath; the number of breaths per minute is reduced: 'breathing in' is considerably accelerated while 'breathing out' is slowed down. Our lips have muscles which are considerably more developed and can be moved towards each other, firmly closed, moved apart, forward, backward or in a round shape. The human tongue is thick, muscular and mobile and opposed to the long, thin tongues of monkeys and the lower jaw is mobile. All this helps in producing various sounds.

Comprehension

Like many other animals, the human brain is divided into a lower section- the brain stem, and a higher section- the cerebrum. The brainstem which is connected to the spinal cord and keeps the body alive by controlling breathing, heart beats etc. The cerebrum, though not essential for life, helps in integrating the organism with her environment. The cerebrum is in turn divided into two halves or two cerebral hemispheres, namely the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere. The hemispheres are linked to one another through a series of bridges.

Many studies have established that anything that is experienced on the right-hand side of the body is processed in the left hemisphere, and anything on the left side is processed in the right hemisphere. Research also tells us that the ability to comprehend and produce speech for many of us (about 90% right-handed and about 70% left-handed) is present in the left hemisphere of the brain.

The simplest and most recently developed test which helps in discovering which hemisphere controls speech is the Dichotic Listening Test. In this test, the subject wears a head phone. Two different words, one into each ear, are played simultaneously for example 'eight' in one ear and 'four' in the other. Most people are found to repeat the word played in the right ear, as this side of our body is controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain, which is the language centre. The sound heard by the left ear takes longer to process as it is first sent to the right hemisphere and then to the left hemisphere(language centre). This non-direct route takes longer to comprehend and produce the word.

Various studies have also proven that two areas of the left hemisphere of the brain are concerned with language: the Broca's area (in front of and just above the left ear) and Wernicke's area (region around and under the left ear). Damage to the Broca's area causes problems in speech production and Wernicke's area damage causes problems in speech comprehension. However, there have been instances where patients had no language disorder even after damage to these areas. According to research, this may be due to variations in the size of the brain areas specialized for these functions from person to person.

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The human body, thus, does have a role in our ability to produce and comprehend speech.

Check Your Progress-2

1. *In how many hemispheres is the human brain divided?*

   (a) one   *(b) two*

   (c) three   *(d) four*

2. *Which hemisphere of the brain is meant for language?*

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3. *Describe the Dichotic Listening Test? What does it show?*

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3.2.2 THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

By the time a child is 4, she is a fluent speaker of her home languages. She acquires these languages when she is exposed to them in plenty of natural, day-to-day situations.

Both Genie and Homna's examples reveal the importance of exposure to a language for a child to start speaking it. Genie was without speech because she did not hear any language and Homna on the other hand picked up more than one language from her surroundings. Thus, a language rich environment where the child can hear care givers/adults talk to each other, or to her, read books to her, sing songs to her, interact with other children, listen to music, watch TV etc is imperative in triggering the natural human predisposition to acquire language.

This is also clear from Isabells's example. Isabella, the child of a deaf-mute had no speech, when she was found at the age of six and half in Ohio in the 1930s as she had spent most of her time in a darkened room alone with her mother. However, once she was exposed to language in a normal environment, she picked it up at a very quickly. She covered in 2 years, the learning that ordinarily takes 6 years and it was not possible to distinguish her from other children by the time she was eight and half.

Besides the need for a linguistically rich environment, what is also clear is that there is a critical period for the acquisition of language- a time set aside by nature for acquisition of language; this essentially varies between 2 to 14 years and during this time acquiring languages almost seems like an effortless task for children. This becomes clearer when we contrast Genie's experience of language acquisition with that of Isabella. Genie was only exposed to language at the age of 13 and was not able to speak grammatically correct sentences, even years after, while Isabella was able to catch on and within two years of being exposed to language was no different from any other child of her age.

Children bought up in linguistically impoverished surroundings like orphanages and institutions, where caregivers do not have adequate time to interact with each child, start speaking at the same time as other children but there speech eventually lags behind and has lesser varieties of construction. The extreme manifestation of this is the case of deaf children, who begin to babble at the same time as the rest of the children but do not hear any language and eventually do not learn to speak if they are not provided hearing aid. However, they all evolve Sign Language. Sign Language is NOT just a set of gestures; it is a language which is systematic as oral language. So, in order to speak a language, a child must be able to hear that language. However, hearing language is also not enough. In one real-life case, a normal hearing son of deaf parents was provided ample exposure to TV and radio programs but did not acquire the ability to speak or understand what was being spoken. What he did learn very effectively, by the age of three, was the use of Sign Language- the language he used to interact with his parents. **Thus, the crucial requirement to acquire a language also appears to be an opportunity to interact with others using the language.**

Children who migrate with their parents from their home countries seem to acquire the language spoken in that country with effortless ease while the adults who have gone with them find this a much more difficult task.

Another question that is pertinent when studying the role of the environment is: Do children learn their home language by imitating their adults? Many studies and observations provide evidence that this is not the case. We will discuss these henceforth.

If children were learning how to speak by imitating adults i.e. hearing their parents speak and repeating after them then they would be responsive to direct corrections and repeated practice provided by parents and other adults. However, it has been found that such corrections and practice have relatively little effect in children acquiring a language.

Let us also see what came out of some efforts of direct correction and repeated

practice made by parents and researchers. In this example a father is trying to teach her child to say 'papa'

Father   :   papa

Child   :   haappa

Father   :   papa

Child   :   haappa

(Repeated at least two times)

Father   :   papa

Child   :   aappa

In the example given below a father is trying to teach her child to say 'papa aayaa'.

Child   :   papa aaii

Father   :   nahiin 'papa aayaa'

Child   :   papa aaii

Father   :   bolo 'papa aayaa'

Child   :   papa aaii

Father   :   nahiin 'papa aayaa'

Father   :   bolo 'papa aayaa'

Child looks away and does not respond.

(Examples of two different children living with their parents in Udaipur.)

We can see in the above examples that forcing children to repeat and imitate does not lead to any success in teaching a child how to speak. Research has also proven that parents try correcting only a small portion of the errors that children make while learning how to speak. Also, more often than not, they end up correcting the truthfulness of the statement rather than whether it is grammatically correct, for example a father will not correct his child when she says *mammii so raha hai* but will correct her if she says *kal somvaar hai* i.e. 'It's Monday tomorrow.' when it is in fact *mangalvaar* 'Tuesday'.

It has also been seen that the very frequent use of 'expansions' by parents is also unsuccessful. When an adult is talking to a child, he very often 'expands' the child's utterances. However, what does seem to help language learning is talking

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to the child about new things. It also seems useless to repeatedly 'correct' children. They learn only when they are cognitively ready to do so.

Check Your Progress-3

1. *What kinds of mistakes are corrected by parents?*

   (a) grammatical errors   *(b) sentence related errors*

   (c) fact related errors   *(d) imitation related errors*

2. *Read the following situation carefully:*

   Child: Want other one spoon, Daddy.

   Father: You mean, you want the other spoon.

   Child: Yes, I want other one spoon, please Daddy.

   Father: Can you say "the other spoon".

   Child: Other ... one ... spoon.

   Father: Say "other'.

   Child: Other.

   Father: 'spoon'.

   Child: Spoon.

   Father: "Other spoon".

   Child: Other ... spoon. Now give me other one spoon?

   <div align="center">

   (Braine, 1971)

   </div>

   a)   *What is the father trying to teach the child?*

   b)   *Was he successful?*

   c)   *What does this example tell you about how children learn language?*

4. *Which of the following things help children acquire language?*

   a)   *A home environment where the child is not allowed to speak*

   b)   *Playing with other children*

   c)   *Hearing adults talk*

   d)   *Asking children to repeat correct sentences*

   e)   *Repeating what the child says*

Further evidence to show that children do not really learn language by imitating adults can also be gathered from the more or less fixed stages

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children pass through as they acquire language and also in the pattern of errors they make in this process.

3.2.3 STAGES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Children seem to pass through a series of more or less fixed 'stages', as they acquire language. The age at which different children reach each stage can vary considerably, however, the order of 'stages' remains the same.

Cooing/Gooing

At around 6 weeks, a child starts cooing and gooing. Initially these sounds seem mostly like a string of vowels – 'uuuu, iiiii'. At around four months, these include consonantal beginnings; the most commonly heard ones are- 'cuuu, guuu'.

Babbling

At about 6 months, when a child is generally sitting up, they progress to babbling. Here they start producing a wider variety of vowels and consonants which are mostly in the form of single consonant - vowel clusters like 'gi-gi-gi', 'ka-ka-ka', 'ma-ma-ma', 'pa-pa-pa', 'mi-mi-mi' etc. At around nine to ten months there is a variation in the combinations such as 'ba-ba-ga-ga' which become more complex like 'mim-mim-mai-yaaaaa' over the next few months; these express emotions and emphasis and include attempted imitations. To parents it seems like children are talking to them and they often react to it. This provides children with some experience of the interactive role of language.

One-word stage

At around the age of one, children produce their first recognizable words. Many of these words are names of people and things that they see around them like *mamaa(mother), paapaa(father), baiyaa(brother), diidii(sister), ciriyaa(bird), guriyaa(doll)*. Also common at this stage are words like *na* (negation), *khatam* (something finishes) and *dedo* (asking for something). This stage is often referred to as the holophrastic (meaning a single word functioning as a phrase or sentence) stage. For example, instead of saying 'I want water' the child could simply say 'mam mam' (water). In fact, they may use just 'mam mam' for a variety of expressions and it is only from the context that parents figure out the approximate meaning of such utterances.

This is also the stage where children's 'mistakes' are caused by both an over-generalization and under-generalization of the meaning of words in comparison to adult meaning. For example, a child will over-generalize the word 'doggie' and call all four legged animals 'doggie'. On the other hand a child who uses the word 'duck' for only her 'toy duck' is under-generalising.

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Two-word stage

By about one and a half years, a child generally has an active vocabulary of some 50 words and starts putting together words in two-word utterances. The first two-word utterances also express the same kind of meaning as those of the one word stage like *duudh nahii, khaanaa nahii* (negation), *duudh katam* (something finishes) and *ball dedo* (asking for something). New kinds of meanings begin to appear later in this stage– *mummii khaanaa(mummy I want roti)*, *jiijii maaraa(jiji hit me)*, *ghuumii jaana(I want to go out)*, *paapaa fona(papa's phone)*, *duduu piinaa(I want milk)*.

At this stage children's utterances begin to resemble the structures of sentences in the languages used around them. This speech is also referred to as telegraphic speech as it very closely resembles telegraph messages which only have content words i.e. words like *doodh, mummii, khaanaa, paapaa, maaraa, fone* etc that carry meaning and does not use little words like *ne, ko, hai, par, se* etc as well as word endings like *yaan, on, iiyan* for plural or *rahe* for continuous tense.

In this stage children also start imitating, taking sentences said by adults and uttering them. For example, the child will say *papa jaa* for *papa jaa rahe hai* and *ghuumii jaa* for *hum ghuumne jaa rahe hai*.

Longer utterances

With time, the word length of children's sentences increase and between the ages of 2 and 4 they acquire various grammatical forms. What is interesting is that most children acquire these forms in roughly the same order. In research studies undertaken by Brown (1973) and de Villiers and de Villiers(1973) with children whose home language is English it was found that children acquire some grammatical forms early and others later; the continuous 'ing' form as in- 'I am sing**ing',** and the plural 's' as in- 'blue shoe**s**, bad dog**s'** is acquired much before the possessive 's' as in- 'daddy**'s car'** and the third person, singular 's' as in- 'he want**s** an apple'. They also acquire irregular past tense verbs like 'came', 'went', 'saw' before they acquire regular past tense verbs 'loved', 'played' and 'worked'. If we study the acquisition of the past tense more carefully we will find that the acquisition of the regular past tense form involves acquisition of the correct irregular forms being replaced with the over generalised forms such as 'comed', ' goed etc and these eventually get replaced with the correct forms 'came' and 'went'.

The significance of this apparent regression and the similarity in stages that children undergo to acquire language is immense. It means that language acquisition is not a straightforward case of practice brings perfection or of simple imitation. If it were, all children would not be following similar stages while

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acquiring language and would never replace common forms such as 'came' and 'went' , which they hear all the time with odd forms like 'comed' and 'goed', that they are unlikely to have come across.

To conclude, from the moment children begin to talk, they seem to be aware that a language (s) they speak have rules. The mistakes that children make while learning to speak correctly are evidence of the fact that children are trying to acquire these rules. Their language at any point of time is not a jumbled collection of words but is also rule bound even though they differ from an adult's. it would also be important to mention over here that a child who is exposed to several languages right from day one will produce comparable forms of complex structures in each of them; even when languages are mixed, they are rule governed.

Review Questions

1. *At which stage do children over-generalize?*

   (a) cooing   *(b) babbling*

   (c) one-word stage   *(d) two-word stage*

2. *What is telegraphic speech?*

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3. *From your experience, think of words that children speak in the one word stage.*

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4. *From your experience, think of an example of an over-generalization a 3 year old child can make while learning words.*

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5. *While acquiring plurals a child whose home language is English goes through the following stages –*

   • *First, acquires irregular plurals like foot-feet, man-men etc.*

- *Then acquires regular plural forms like cats and bags.*

- *She over generalizes the above rule to make plurals of foot and man as feets and mens.*

- *Eventually the over generalized plurals are corrected and the child goes back to pluralizing foot and man as feet and men respectively.*

What does this tell you about how children learn language?

3.3 SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION LEARNING

By the time children come to school they are fluent speakers of their home languages. The medium of instruction in school for some is the language being spoken at home but for most others the medium of instruction is new to them. For example, a child in Bihar may be speaking Bhojpuri or Maithili at home but goes to school where the medium of instruction is Hindi or a child in Bengal who speaks Santhali or Nepali at home may encounter Bengali in school. In both the above situations a child may also be required to learn English at school in the primary classes. Hindi, Bengali and English are all second languages for these children.

Acquiring second languages in all the above situations is challenging as children either do not encounter the language at all in their home environment or do so to a limited extent. Children also get only few hours of exposure to the second language during school time and more often than not for languages like English this exposure may not be possible at all as the teacher herself may not know the language. In this section we will discuss whether children can 'acquire' their second languages like their first. In doing so, we will discuss the various factors that affect the acquisition of second languages in the classroom. We will also discuss the role of 'learning' in second languages. We will conclude by critically examining the generally held belief that languages already learnt by the child interfere with her learning second languages.

3.3.1   CAN SECOND LANGUAGES BE 'ACQUIRED' LIKE FIRST LANGUAGES?

Before answering this question, let us discuss the difference between the terms 'language acquisition' and 'language learning'.

Language Acquisition refers to developing competence in a language by using it in natural, communicative situations as available while learning languages we hear in our homes and the neighbourhood. Language Learning on the other hand refers to developing competence in a language by learning its rules and vocabulary through explicit teaching in a classroom setting.

Krashen talks about these two as ways of developing competence in second languages and states that, *'…language acquisition, (is) a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language. Language acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication….(in this process) we are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have a "feel" for correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated. Other ways of describing acquisition include implicit learning, informal learning, and natural learning. In non-technical language, acquisition is "picking-up" a language.*

The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language learning. We will use the term "learning" henceforth to refer to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. In non-technical terms, learning is "knowing about" a language, known to most people as "grammar", or "rules". Some synonyms include formal knowledge of a language, or explicit learning.' (Krashen, 1982:10)

We have seen in the first section that children have immense potential for acquiring language. Most children learn at least two languages in their childhood from their home environments and like Homna, can pick up more languages, which they are exposed to in their natural settings. If we take into account this immense capacity that a child has for acquiring language, as long as normal, day-to-day exposure to it is provided, then we will appreciate that a second language can also be acquired in an environment which provides ample exposure to it.

We can see this clearly in the example of children who leave their home countries with their families to settle in foreign countries. For example, Hindi speaking children who leave India to settle in America, acquire English at school where they hear and interact with their classmates and teachers in the language and also in various other places like the market, TV etc. Thus, the richer the exposure to the second language, the greater is the possibility that we will acquire it.

However, helping children acquire a second language holds considerable challenge for teachers. The language rich environment that is available in the first language is invariably not available in the second language. And in the case of a language like English in India, where exposure at school is also restricted to 30 minutes or less in the day and the teacher herself may not be a fluent speaker of that language, the situation is even more demanding.

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3.3.2 HOW CAN WE HELP CHILDREN TO 'ACQUIRE' THEIR SECOND LANGUAGE?

Though challenging, providing a language rich environment similar to the one that is available to children when they are acquiring their home languages, remains one important part of the answer. In Krashen's words children require 'comprehensible input' in the second language. 'Comprehensible input' refers to using language which children are capable of understanding, and at the same time holds challenge for them. An important part of making this language comprehensible is providing it in natural, communicative situations that are meaningful to children and this will help children in meeting the challenge. For example, if children in your class know some words in English then 'comprehensible input' might mean using these words in sentences that are meaningful for them. A teacher may give instructions like - rub the black-board, pick up the pencil, read from the chart etc., to children where the context and the teacher's actions/ demonstration will help the child in building meaning around words like black-board, pencil and chart she already knows. Thus, here the teacher provides 'comprehensible input' in the form of instructions which contain words that a child is familiar with and at the same time the challenge of understanding the instruction can be met because of the context in which it is being given. Unlike traditional second language teaching approaches which require the child to learn the structure/grammar rules first and then practice them as communication, second language acquisition requires 'going from meaning' to 'structure'.

Krashen clearly states that '*speaking fluency cannot be taught directly. Rather it, 'emerges' over time, on it own. The best way, and perhaps the only way, to teach speaking, according to this view, is simply to provide comprehensible input. Early speech will come when the acquirer feels "ready"; this state of readiness arrives at somewhat different times for different people, however. Early speech, moreover, is typically not grammatically accurate. Accuracy develops over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input (Krashen,1982:22).*

Besides the need for 'comprehensible input' some other factors also affect acquisition of the second language. Children's motivation's to learn the target language, their self confidence, their curiosity/anxiety about learning in general, and their attitude towards the language all affect language learning. These factors can either impede or encourage second language acquisition.

Much research has shown that even though people may be provided 'comprehensible input' in the target language, they may be unsuccessful in acquiring it if they have low motivation or low self confidence or low curiosity levels. The process of language learning may also become slow if learners have high anxiety levels About learning in general.

While a teacher does not have much control over student's motivation, self confidence and attitudes (s)he must provide 'comprehensible input' in the classroom and also create such an environment where children can learn without any fear or hesitation. According to Krashen, *'The effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation. (Krashen, 1982:32)*

3.3.3 WHAT IS THE ROLE THAT 'LEARNING' HAS IN DEVELOPING COMPETENCE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE?

Learning the rules of a language, is not a replacement of the process of language acquisition which helps children become fluent speakers in that language, however it can help children in monitoring their progress to see whether they have written or spoken correctly or not. According to Krashen, *'Normally, acquisition "initiates" our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been "produced" by the acquired system. This can happen before we speak or write, or after (self-correction).' (Krashen, 1982:15)*

Needless to say that conscious learning of the rules of grammar can act as a monitor only when a person has enough time to think about and use these rules to correct her and must also be continuously focused on the accuracy of what she is saying. Generally when two individuals are in a conversation, fluency is more important than accuracy. In fact, if a person was to use the monitor in his speech it would be unnaturally hesitant and inattentive. However, the monitor is useful when we are writing and have time to think about the accuracy of what we have written.

Check Your Progress-5

1. Generally speaking second language acquisition starts from:

    (a) expression   *(b) comprehension*

    (c) self-analysis   *(d) analyzing right/wrong*

2. Which language do you consider your second language(s)?

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> *3. Which are second languages to children who come to your school?*
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> *4. What factors are important for children to acquire their second languages?*
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3.3.4 DOES OUR FIRST LANGUAGE INTERFERE WITH OUR LEARNING OF THE SECOND LANGUAGE?

For some time now it was thought that many errors that children make while acquiring the second language are due to their first language-its grammar, vocabulary and phonology (sounds). We shall discus this in the context of Hindi as the first language and English as the second language.

Grammar

Perhaps the most obvious difference between Hindi and English sentences is that in Hindi the verb is placed at the end of sentences and in English it is in the middle of the sentence. For example:

meiN seb <u>khaa rahaa huuN</u>

<u>I am eating</u> an apple.

However, this never seems to cause a problem to native Hindi speakers learning English. We never heard a native speaker of Hindi saying 'I an apple am eating' where like Hindi the verb is placed at the end of the sentence.

Much research has proven that many 'mistakes' made by children while learning the second language are not caused by an interference of their first language. Children and even adults follow a 'natural order' of acquiring the rules of the second language regardless of what their first language is. This order is also similar to the order in which they would acquire the language if it was their first. Thus, when English is being acquired by native speakers of different first languages then the continuous 'ing' form and the plural 's' is acquired much before the third person, singular 's' and the possessive 's'. Prominent among them is the study done by Dulay and Burt (1974) with children of Chinese and Spanish origin.

A 'natural order' can also be seen in the errors that children make while acquiring a structure. For example, in acquiring 'negation' many students put the negative marker in front of the sentence:

<u>Not</u> like it now.   Ravem (1974)

At a later stage, they put the negative marker in front of the verb:

I no like this one   Cancino et al. (1975)

This uniformity of stages that children of different native languages undergo while acquiring a common second language and the fact that these stages are similar when the language is acquired as a first language suggests that we all undergo a natural process of language acquisition and these errors are not a case of first language interference.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary of any language is affected by the socio-cultural environment it is being spoken in, for example, Indian users of English have to use English to communicate with other Indian users in contexts which are essentially Indian. For example:

- On *Diwali* a person goes to the temple and he is given *prasad* by the *pujari*. He buys a new *kurta pajama* for himself and new *sari* for his wife. They light *diiyaas* around their house and eat various sweets like *jalebi, ras gullas* etc.

- The newspaper was full of reports of *dharnaas* and *bandhs* being organized all over India.

- The *shamiiaanaa* was beautifully decorated for the marriage.

- The *feraa* and the *kanyaa daan* took place after one at night.

(*Diwali-* A Hindu festival of lights, Prasad- holy sweets given in the place of worship of Hindus(temple)   *Pujari-* A Hindu priest, *kurta-pajama-* an Indian dress, *sari-* an Indian dress worn by women, *diiyaas-* small lamps made of mud, *jalebi and rasgulla-* Indian sweets, *dharnas and bandhs-* strikes, *shamiiaanaa-* a larget tent generally used to house a big gathering of people, *feraa-* a ritual at a hindu marriage in which the bride and the groom walk around a lit fire, *kanyaa daan-* a ritual at a Hindu marriage in which the bride's father gives away the bride)

The itialised words are Hindi words and are used in English sentences without any change. They are an effect of Indian society and culture on the English spoken by the Indian user. Such words express an Indian style of living and are not

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included in other varieties of English such as British, American, Australian, Singaporean, South African etc. Some part of the vocabulary of every variety of English would thus inevitably be culture bound.

At the same time, when English is spoken in India some words will be used differently. In the so-called native varieties of English(such as British, American etc.) the words 'uncle' and 'aunt' are used only to refer to familial relationships like – *mama, masi, bua, fuufaa* etc but when Indians use these words they also use them to refer to elders, neighbors, shopkeepers, friends of parents, bus drivers etc. We also shorten groups of words like 'address of welcome', 'members of the family', 'bunch of keys', 'box of matches' as 'welcome address', 'family member', 'key bunch', and 'match box'. Similarly, while native English varieties contain the word 'postpone', the word 'prepone' is only a part of Indian English, although it is now widely understood and often appreciated. Indian English also contains various phrases which are not found in any native variety of English like 'pin-drop silence', 'change of heart', 'each and every', 'do the needful' etc.

The importance given to people higher in rank is also expressed in a variety of address forms, signing off forms and phrases used in formal communications used in Indian English which are not a part of varieties of some other varieties:

Respected sir

Draw your **kind attention** to

To bring to your **kind notice**

Thus, using words from the languages already known for various concepts/ objects etc., which do not have any equivalents in the second language, using words of the second language differently and coining new words and phrases based on the environment in which the language is being spoken are natural processes when two different languages and cultures come in contact with each other. They cannot be termed as interference which connotes a negative transfer from the first language to the second language.

Check Your Progress-6

1. *Where do we find phrases like 'pin-drop silence', 'change of heart', 'each and every'?*

    (a) Indigenous English   *(b) Indian English*

    (c) American English   *(d) Australian English*

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2.   *What is the main difference between the sentences of Hindi and English?*

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3.   *'India's cultural and social aspects are clearly visible in Indian English.' Give examples to prove the above statement.*

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Phonology

English spoken in different parts of the world does not sound the same. A British speaking English sounds very different from an American speaking English. An Australian sounds different from both the American and the British and an Indian sounds different from all three. The same is true for Hindi spoken in different parts of the country, for example, it would not be very difficult to tell whether the person speaking Hindi is from Bengal, Bihar or Tamil Nadu.

This is not because the vocabulary and grammar of the language being spoken by people from the different regions is different but because they sound different to our ears. There are several reasons for this. One is being discussed here-

The second language that we learn may have sounds that are not present in the first language. For example, a native English speaker uses two different sounds to pronounce the first letters of the words 'van' and 'watch' but a Hindi speaker of English pronounces both words with the same 'v' sound. Similarly, Hindi speakers will invariably pronounce the word 'treasure' or 'measure' as 'treazure' and 'meazure' as they do not have an equivalent sound for the 'Z' in the two words.

Similar things would be true for native speakers of English when they are trying to learn Hindi. They would find it extremely difficult to say words like *khargosh, ghar, chhatrii, jharnaa, thelaa, phuul, bhaaluu* etc and might pronounce them as *kargosh, gar, chatrii, jarnaa, telaa, puul, baaluu, gar* respectively. This is because the sounds *kh, gh, ch, jh, th, ph* and *bh* are not available in English. The same would be true for words starting with **T, Th, D, Dh** as these sounds are also not available in English.

(*khargosh*- rabbit, *ghar*-house, *chhatrii*-umbrella, *jharnaa*- stream, *thelaa*-bag, *phuul*-flower, *bhaaluu*- bear)

Thus, phonology is an area where we can actually see an interference of the first language. One thing that affects the learner's ability to grapple with the sounds of a language is her age. With time our jaws get fixed and it becomes difficult for us to produce certain sounds. Also the capacities of our brain to comprehend new sounds diminish after a certain age. Children pick up sounds of the second language up to the age of puberty i.e., by the time language gets specialized in the left hemisphere of the brain. In fact, if you place an Indian child of about 3-4 years in an English speaking nation like America or Britain and provide him opportunity to interact with English speaking children, the child would sound like an American or British child in a matter of a few months.

Check Your Progress-7

1. *Why does a native English speaker find it difficult to say 'khargosh'?*

   (a) this word is not found in English

   (b) 'kh' sound is not present in English

   (c) doesn't want to speak Hindi

   (d) does not try to learn.

2. *Why do we find it difficult to speak out sounds that are not present in our environment after a certain age?*

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3. *Listen to any TV channel or radio station from Britan or America. Does the English that you hear on these channels sound similar to the English spoken on an Indian channel or station? Make a similar comparison of the Hindi spoken on a regional channel say a Bengali channel or a Punjabi channel with that of a channel which has country-wide viewership. Does the Hindi spoken on all these channels sound the same?*

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3.4 METHODS OF LANGUAGE-TEACHING

Methods of language-teaching have been influenced by a variety of extant social, political and psychological factors. Prominent among these are the 'needs of society at a particular point of time', 'an understanding of what language is' and an 'understanding of how children learn'.

3.4.1 GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD

It is the oldest method that has been used for teaching language and is still commonly used. The main objective of teaching language through this method is developing proficiency to read literature in the target language and write in it. Students are expected to memorise rules of grammar and vocabulary lists and translate from the base language to the target language and vice versa with the support of teachers. The biggest limitation of this method is that the children do not acquire proficiency in listening and speaking the language.

The methods that came to be commonly used after this method gave more attention to listening and speaking. These methods were- Direct Method and Audio Lingual Method. These methods developed not only to give more attention to listening and speaking skills and as a response to the grammar translation method but also as an echo of the understanding that had developed in linguistics that the basic form of language is speech and only few languages are found to have written forms. This was also the time that the Second World War had given rise to the need for many translators, spies, code room assistants etc., who were fluent in many languages. Thus, these methods emphasise listening and speaking. In the Audio-lingual method, dialogue became a primary unit of teaching.

The discovery of the tape-recorder and language laboratories helped in the use of this method. Given below is the example of a dialogue used in the Audio-lingual method.

Kamal: What is your name?

Geeta: My name is Geeta. What is yours?

Kamal: My name is Kamal. Geeta, where do you live?

Geeta: I live in Ashok Vihar. Where do you live?

Kamal: I live in Rajendra Nagar.

It is now important to talk about the modern methods of teaching language- the Communicative Method and the Natural Approach.

3.4.4 COMMUNICATIVE METHOD

Communicative Method is affected by the various researches that have been undertaken in linguistics. Socio-linguistics made it clear that acquiring language does not mean learning only the structure of language but also learning how to use language appropriately according to context. It was natural that methods of language teaching that were affected by these ideas made 'communication in context' the basis of teaching language. If we teach using this method then chapters look like this– 'At the railway station', 'With the Doctor', 'In a Job' etc.

3.4.5 NATURAL APPROACH

This method gives maximum attention to the fact that in language teaching the focus should not be on the teacher or the teaching-learning material but on the learner (student). This fact was also affected by researches done in linguistics. From these researches it also became clear that making mistakes is an essential step in the process of acquiring language. On analyzing these errors it was also found that these errors are in fact indicators of a child's knowledge and learning process.

These researches also tried to prove that children have innate ability to acquire language from birth. A 4-year old internalizes the rules of her language and does not make mistakes in speaking even before entering school. That is why the Natural Approach focuses on giving the child a tension free environment for learning language as well as providing interesting and challenging teaching– learning material of her level.

Check Your Progress-8

1.   What is the focus of the Direct Method?

(a) translation   (b) contextual use language

(c) children   (d) accuracy in speaking

2.   Which is the oldest method of teaching language? What are its limitations?

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3.   Today which language teaching method is used commonly and why?

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4. *Create an interesting dialogue to teach language through the Audio Lingual Method.*

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

- Children learn the first language from their environment without any explicit teaching i.e., without going to schools or reading books.

- Children have an innate ability to acquire language. They acquire more than one language proficiently if it is present in their environment. Therefore, children do not learn language by just imitating adults.

- Children acquire language naturally between 2-14 years. This period is thus referred to as the critical period for acquiring language. After this period it is difficult to learn language so naturally and as a native speaker, particularly if our focus is on pronunciation. Grammar and vocabulary may be learnt at any age if adequate exposure is available.

- The Broca's area and Wernicke's area in the left hemisphere of the human brain, are responsible for language related activities. These areas are responsible for speech production and speech comprehension respectively. Damage in these areas affects language acquisition.

- While learning language children go through various stages such as cooing, babbling, one word stage, two word stage, etc.

- Explicit teaching may be important in learning a second language. However, the second language can also be learnt as we learn the first language if the child gets a language rich environment during her critical period.

- 'Comprehensible input' and a 'natural and communication friendly environment' play an important role in acquiring second language.

- In the teaching of second languages, in addition to contexualised meaning, a focus on grammar may also help a great deal.

- In second language learning accuracy and fluency increase with time.

- Children's motivation, self confidence, curiosity and attitude towards learning language play an important role in language acquisition.

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- Our first language does not interfere in the learning of the second language.

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3.7 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. What are the differences and similarities between language learning and language acquisition?

2. Think of the role a rich language environment plays in first language acquisition.

3. How does the biological adaptation of the human body help in learning language?

4. Explain with an example (of a conversation) that children do not learn language by imitation.

5. What is the importance of the 'critical period' in acquiring language?

6. What is the difference between telegraphic speech and holophrastic speech?

7. If children are provided with a language rich environment for the second language can they also acquire the second language as they have acquired the first language? If yes, explain how?

8. Discuss the various methods and tools to learn second language.

9. Do you believe that our first language does not interfere in the learning of second language? Explain with logical arguments.

10. Which part of the brain is responsible for language related activities? What are the functions of Broca's area and Wernicke's area?

11. List the advantages and limitations of the different methods of teaching language while discussing them in short.

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