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7.1 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall discuss:

- 1) The Meaning of Language
- 2) The process of First Language Acquisition
- 3) Second Language- Its Meaning and Process of Language Acquisition
- 4) Various Strategies of Language Learning

On Completing the Unit, the students would be able to:

- 1) Distinguish the First Language from the Second Language

- 2) Apply Different Methods to Learn a Language More Effectively.
- 3) Find out the Reasons for Slow Learning and would overcome those.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool that differentiates humans from animals. It enhances their capacity to express themselves as well as to understand others. Primarily a second language is learnt in an environment where it is not the primary mode of communication, thus the learner faces many problems while acquiring/learning a new language. This unit focuses upon highlighting the Language Learning Strategies and Methods and the factors that help determine how well learner is learning. It highlights the meaning of language, difference between language acquisition and language learning and provides a description about various methods of language learning.

7.3 MEANING OF LANGUAGE

Language is a medium of communication and a means to interact with other people and make them understand our feelings and emotions. It is a collection of words, conveying different meanings, and is used according to the needs and requirements of the users. Apart from language there are other ways of communication too, such as symbols, signs and gestures. For example, a small child expresses his hunger by crying and the mother understands it.

It is the language that differentiates humans from animals because it enables us to explicitly express our emotions, feelings, ideas and vision. Also it enables us to talk about that which had happened in the past or which might happen in future. Language is used in two forms- written and spoken. Whenever we talk about language acquisition, it is taken to be a reference to the spoken language. Every human being acquires language from his/her parents and environment around it and this acquired language is known as first language or the mother-tongue. It is called mother-tongue because a baby begins to learn language in his/her mother's lap.

7.4 LEARNING THE FIRST LANGUAGE

In order to learn the first language a child requires the company of other family members. When the child hears them talking, he/she tries to understand and imitate them. That's why hearing impaired children cannot speak and are given some kind of aid to understand and communicate with people. A child learns a language by listening to it. In a way language is not genetically inherited but is acquired by the child in the due course of time. Normally, all children during the ages of first two

or three years start acquiring their mother-tongue and complete by the ages of five to six. Language acquisition also depends upon the development of motor-skills and the maturation of the brain too. Nevertheless, only hearing sounds is not enough, for communication the child should understand the language in a certain context and respond to it. This first language works as a cultural transmitter too.

7.5 SECOND LANGUAGE : MEANING

Sometimes people live in an environment where they learn more than one language; the language apart from their mother tongue is called “Second Language”. As for the people living in Maharashtra or Gujarat, their mother tongue is Marathi or Gujarati and their second language can be Hindi or English whereas the people in Uttar Pradesh have Hindi as their mother-tongue and English becomes their second language. People who have two languages are known as Bilingual. However, in some regions, the second language is introduced much later. Thus the learner’s ability to use the second language proficiently, does not match with his/her ability to use the first language. Even after years of study, sometimes learners lack to acquire adequate command over language. When a learner is exposed to the first language, his/her sensory organs set themselves accordingly and when the second language is introduced, those sensory organs compare the language structures and it creates confusion for the learner. The sound system and the structure of the second language is not always similar to that of first language and learners try to learn it in the same way as their first language, which is why learners find it hard to learn English as a second language. There are various approaches to overcome the difficulties in acquiring English as a second language.

- **Check your Progress -1**

1) What is the meaning of Language?

2) What is the difference between First Language and the Second Language?

3) Why do we need language?

7.6 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In our country English is considered to be our second language but sometimes learning English as a second language is different from learning it as a foreign language. When we learn a language which is spoken by the surrounding community, it is called second language and when it is learnt in a totally different environment it is considered a foreign language. We can understand it thus: an Indian student is learning English in his/her own country (India), would be learning English as a Second Language; when a Vietnamese student learns English he/she would be learning it as a Foreign Language.

However in the present scenario the expression, “Second Language Learning” is more prevalent as it could apply on both situations.

7.7 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

There is a significant difference between acquisition and learning. The term “Acquisition” denotes steady growth of an ability to use a language confidently and naturally in different situations, whereas “Learning” is a more conscious process of accruing knowledge and it requires more attentive use of vocabulary, grammar, rules and features etc.

When a young child starts accepting language and follows it the way adults use it, he/she automatically acquires it. After acquiring the language, he/she efficiently uses that language. On the other hand, if the same child is studying Science or Maths, he will have to be more attentive to understand the terms, rules, equations and sequence. This process is known as “Learning”. Thus, when we talk about Second Language, we associate it with learning instead of acquiring, though these days the terms learning and acquisition are used interchangeably, quite surprisingly.

Check your Progress : 2

1) How does a child acquire a language?

- 2) What is the difference between language acquisition and language learning?

7.8 METHODS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

In India most of the students are introduced to second language in their teenage or adulthood. It is the time when they are occupied with many other works that require attention, many other subjects to study, and they have a known language for their daily communication requirements along with it. Thus the learner faces many barriers while learning the second language. These barriers can be constraints in following the given time-limit, the confusions created by the different grammar patterns of mother tongue and the second language restrain them from reaching native-like proficiency in language. Another significant problem is that there are people who confidently express themselves in writing but they hesitate to speak and find it hard to express themselves. This hesitation is due to limited access to the vocabulary, the Grammar as well as improper pronunciation.

Keeping in mind the barriers, it is proven that students in their early teens are better learners because at this age the optimum learning capacity works better than those of adults. Technically, language acquisition is easier for a learner before lateralization sets. This happens around the age of 11 years. However, there are various methods and processes to teach and learn second language effectively. These methods make it easy to learn and acquire second language.

There are various approaches that focus on effective language learning. Some of the most commonly used methods are as follows-

7.9 THE TRANSLATION METHOD

This method is also known as Grammar-Translation Method which is an old method of language teaching. The learners are taught rules of Grammar and are given tasks of translating from one language to another. This method focuses upon learning the rules of Grammar, vocabulary

building and memorization. The focal point and emphasis of this approach is on written language skills rather than upon the oral skills. Learning by this method can be effective for written skills but the learner is sometimes unaware of the practical usage of the language. Thus, while this method helps in mastering the skills of written communication, sometimes it falls short in imparting oral communicative skills.

7.10 THE AUDIO LINGUAL METHOD

This method is just opposite of the previous one. It focuses upon the spoken-language with the help of some repetitive practice exercises. Students are taught through simple drills moving towards the difficult ones. These oral drills are conducted in a language laboratory. The Audio Lingual Method encourages fluent use of language by practicing it. This method doesn't highlight the grammatical mistakes but intends to allow the learners to learn by practice. For example the use of cassettes played in the language laboratory.

Though this method allows the oral practice of the language but isolated practices do not strengthen the speaking skills.

Imitation Method: It is a well known fact that children imitate (copy) their adult and this is the starting point of learning. While acquiring first language, a child imitates his parents and other members of his family and tries to repeat the words. This repetition helps enhancing his/her ability to learn a language. The theory of Imitation was developed by B.F. Skinner based upon behaviourism. The theory implies that a child grasps the behaviour of people around him and learns to respond.

When applied on Second Language Learning, this method may not be very effective as the learners not only imitate but add their own generalization also.

Data Collection Method: The linguists collect data from different resources and for various purposes. This data is required for enhancing the learning process. The collected data is in the form of examples or samples of written as well as spoken language. While the learner struggles to acquire command over a new language, this previously collected data is used to help them. This data is collected by different methods.

Introspection

Observation

Samples of Written Language

Elicitation

The data is collected by an inductive analytical method through direct contact of people.

Overgeneralization: It refers to an overt use of grammatical rules in the situations, where it is not required. While learning second language, the learner applies same grammatical rule in diverse cases. This deviation is referred to as overgeneralization. For example, while using the plural the learner says foots instead of feet, mans instead of men and childs instead of children. Such mistakes occur due to overgeneralization of the morphological rule of making plurals. Similarly while using past tense of some verbs, the learner makes a mistake due to overgeneralization, for example- goed instead of went, bringed instead of brought and eated instead of ate.

These words do not come by imitation but are created by the learners while applying the grammatical rules and are called over-generalization. However, the learner modifies himself/herself with practice.

Check your Progress : 3

1) How many important methods of language learning are there?

2) What is the meaning of Imitation?

3) What is the drawback of Translation Method?

4) Define the Audio Lingual Method.

5) What do you understand by Over-Generalisation?

Second Language Learning Strategies

Cognitive Strategies: This strategy is based upon reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing and outlining. In this strategy, language acquisition is done in practical settings and information is arranged in a way to provide better knowledge structures. Cognitive Strategy allows the students to maneuver the target language correctly by employing all the possible processes, for example, the use of dictionary.

Metacognitive Strategy: This strategy is based upon gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study system, monitoring the progress and evaluating the performance. The use of Metacognitive strategy has an executive effect on the cognitive strategy in task completion. In fact, Metacognitive strategies play an effective role in language learning and allow the learners to change their method of learning if effective results are not shown. For example, inspecting study material and selecting more useful information.

Compensatory Strategy: This strategy is employed by the learner to compensate the missing knowledge while learning the Second Language, for example, using the synonyms of some words due to the limitations of the vocabulary. This strategy helps the students to write and speak in the second language even when their vocabulary is limited. For example, learners guess form the linguistic context and understand the meaning even though their vocabulary is restricted. This strategy helps them to compensate their limited vocabulary.

Affective Strategy: This strategy helps the learner to control his/her emotions, feelings, attitudes, values etc. It helps the learners to control their feelings thereby learning becomes more effective. For example, while learning second language, a learner may encounter anxiety and stress. These conditions can be controlled by deep breathing and self assessment. Such techniques have a powerful influence upon the learning capacity of the learner. However, sometimes these Affective Strategies are not capable of creating any results because of learner's cognitive and metacognitive skills overpower the affective strategies. This happens at a very later stage when learner has already achieved higher proficiency thus those affective strategies are not very much required.

Social Strategy: This strategy allows the learner to understand and learn the language in realistic settings. The learner interacts with the native speakers and understands their culture and this conversation enhances his/her proficiency in second language. This strategy is effective and useful as it provides opportunity to experience and communicate with

people with ease. Video Cassettes are useful in the absence of a live native speaker of English. Hence we have the use of such cassettes in B.B.A., B.C.A. and B.E.(IT) programs in our universities. Along with that, it improves the social behaviour of the learner. Though this strategy works strongly, yet sometimes a learner finds it confusing and hard to cope up while interacting with native speakers in person or speaking on a video cassette as a character.

Check your Progress : 4

1) How many strategies of Language Learning are there?

2) Define Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies.

3) Why is Social Strategy of Language Learning important?

4) What is a Compensatory Strategy of Language Learning?

Fossilization

The theory of Fossilization was first discussed by Selinker in 1972. It is one of the important attributes of Second Language Learning. This method works on two ideas: one, that of preserving the ancient linguistic features, whose grammatical functions have been lost and the other, the loss of a grammatical paradigm that is still used in some words. According to Selinkar, “Fossilization, as presented in much of the literature, is understood to be the inability of a person to attain native speaker like proficiency in the target language.” As per this definition, a learner’s inability to achieve native-speaker proficiency is called

Fossilization. An adult Second Language Learner acquires only a fossilized inter-language because an adult learner finds it hard to achieve the native speaker like proficiency.

Individual Fossilization and Group Fossilization: The persistence in the development of individual learner is called Individual Fossilization whereas group fossilization is a highland in the diachronic growth of the language at the larger level. An individual learner repeats the errors that affect his language competence. The learner believes that he/she has corrected those errors but keeps on committing them, this process creates individual fossilization. At the group level the phonological and lexical changes become pervasive and create fossilization.

Temporary Fossilization and Permanent Fossilization: The temporary fossilization persists for a shorter period and is called “Stabilization”. While the permanent fossilization is a result of social, psychological and interactive variables.

Types of Fossilization

Phonological Fossilization: The incorrect pronunciation occurs due to phonological fossilization. It happens due to difference in the phonology of languages.

Morphological Fossilization: This fossilization exists due to various morphemes in English language. Basically the problem arises with inflectional morphemes and articles. The usage of “s” as a suffix for singular subjects confuses the learners because their mother tongue does not have similar grammar rules.

Syntactic Fossilization: Such fossilization occurs with the usage of tenses. When there is a difference between the rules of First language and the second language, the learner may get confused while using the Verb according to the tense, for example, the use of past tense and the past participle.

Semantic Fossilization: This fossilization refers to the use of words that exist in the second language but they have a different meaning in some other language or the first language of the learner.

Pragmatic Fossilization: The pragmatic and semantic fossilization are inter-related. It takes place in the cross-cultural communication. The learner is unable to understand what is meant by any particular word or statement. The usage of new words and phrases confuses him and creates fossilization.

Methods to reduce Fossilization

- 1) Fossilization can be reduced by adopting proper learning strategies. However, this solution is confusing as what may be good for one learner may be not useful for the other.

- 2) Fossilization can be checked by reducing the amount of negative transfer of information. Sometimes the learner uses improper words or communicates insufficient information which is termed as negative information. This sort of communication creates fossilization. We can reduce such fossilization, by enhancing the learner's capacity to understand and use the second language.
- 3) An exposure to the native speakers of the second language as well as to the native culture can reduce the amount of fossilization.

Check your Progress : 5

- 1) What is Fossilization?

- 2) How can we reduce Fossilization?

- 3) What is the difference between Pragmatic and Semantic Fossilization?

- 4) Define Morphological Fossilization.

7.11 SUMMING UP

- 1) The Unit has focused upon the meaning of language.
- 2) It tells about the acquisition of a language
- 3) This unit provides a description about the methods of language learning as well as the barriers.

7.12 KEY WORDS

Acquisition	to obtain
Cognitive	perceptive (understanding)
Semantic	pertaining to meaning
Syntactic	according to syntax
Pragmatic	rational

7.13 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- 1) Abraham, R., & Vann, R., 1987: Strategies of two learners: A case study. In A.L. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner Strategies in Language Learning* (pp. 85-102). New York: Prentice Hall.
- 2) Chamot, A.U., Barnhardt, S., El-Dinary, P., & Robbins, J., 1996: Methods for teaching learning strategies in the foreign language classroom. In R. Oxford (Ed.), *Language Learning Strategies Around the World: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (pp.175-188). Manoa: University of Hawaii Press.

❖ **Answer**

Check your Progress (1)

- 1) Language is a tool of communication.
- 2) First Language is the mother tongue of a child whereas second language is an additional language that he/she learns later on.
- 3) We need language to communicate with each other.

Check your Progress (2)

- 1) A child acquires language by Imitation.
- 2) “Acquisition” denotes steady growth of an ability to use a language confidently and naturally in different situations and with native speakers, whereas “Learning” is a more conscious process of accruing knowledge and it requires more attentive use of vocabulary, grammar, rules and features etc.

Check your Progress : 3

- 1) Five
- 2) Imitation is the copying of the behaviour of elders as children copy the language of elders.
- 3) The Translation Method falls short in oral communicative skills.
- 4) The method that includes audio and verbal exercises together. It focuses upon the spoken-language with the help of some repetitive practice exercises. Students are taught through simple drills, moving towards the difficult ones.
- 5) While learning second language, the learner applies same grammatical rules in diverse cases. This mistake is referred to as overgeneralization.

Check your Progress : 4

- 1) Five
- 2) In Cognitive strategy, language acquisition is done in practical settings and information is arranged in a way to provide better knowledge structures while Metacognitive strategy is based upon gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study system, monitoring the progress and evaluating the performance.
- 3) This strategy allows the learner to understand and learn the language in realistic settings.
- 4) This strategy is employed by the learner to compensate the missing knowledge while learning the Second Language. For example, using the synonyms due to deficient of vocabulary.

Check your Progress :5

- 1) According to Selinker, “Fossilization, as presented in much of the literature, is understood to be the inability of a person to attain native like ability in the target language.”
- 2) Fossilization can be reduced by adopting proper learning strategies and by paying proper attention to the learner.
- 3) In Pragmatic Fossilization the learner is unable to understand what is meant by any particular word or statement, whereas Semantic Fossilization is the use of words that exist in the second language, but have a different meaning in some other language.
- 4) This fossilization is due to various morphemes in English language. The usage of “s” as a suffix for singular subjects confuses the learners because their mother tongue does not have such structures or rules of grammar.