

## **Imitation, Retention, Reinforcement - An Effective Way to Learn Second Language**

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It is a wonderful feat in one's life to learn maternal or native language and also a second or a foreign language. A child learns a language by imitation and reinforcement - as it learns the maternal language, so it should do with the foreign language. The imitations of adult speech become steadily better. As the child grows the language grows. In the second language acquisition, the age of acquisition, the type of exposure to the second language, learners' knowledge of other languages can be taken into consideration. Presently, the research on the second language acquisition involves the creative construction of a grammar and it finds the parallels between native language and second language acquisition.

Lado (1961, p. 13) observes that the complex process of communication through language as we know it is made possible by the system of habits which operates largely without our awareness. These habits are deeply set in the nervous system of the individual and in his muscular, intellectual, and emotional processes. To change any part of this system of habits is a major undertaking. To set a parallel system involved in learning a foreign language is equally a formidable task.

It can be argued that the gravity of the native language, while acquiring the second language is evident. Since it is like learning a new set of linguistic habits, the primary set of habits would interfere with the secondary set that is learnt, wherever the two sets do not have similarities. This perception leads to the comparison of linguistic systems of the native language and the foreign language. The transfer of habits from the native language distorts meaning in the foreign language, which ultimately results in learning problems. If the structure in the native language and its counterpart in the foreign language run parallel to each other in terms of form, function, and distribution, then learning the second language would be easier. So, the real nature of the learning problems can be assessed and solved by making a comparison between the

structures of the native language with those of the foreign language.

Studies report that language acquisition is a creative process guided by innate mechanisms. Language production is seen as a coherent system rather than as a distortion of the second language. It is perceived that the learners of the second language commit errors in the same kind of patterns and structures, though they have different maternal languages. Some patterns and structures are more complex than others because they have their own cultural and linguistic meanings. When these forms are used, the listener or the reader perceives them, and through them he or she grasps the intended meanings encoded. Though the process of communication involves a complex system of habits in terms of patterns and structures, the native user is not particularly conscious of them, because they constitute his or her linguistic repository. These learning problems, to quote Lado (1961), turn out to be matter of form, meaning, distribution or a combination of these. They can be predicted and explained in most case by a systematic linguistic comparison of the two language structures. (p. 24).

Palmer (1968, p. 68) offers a solution to these problems. Learning by heart is the basis of all linguistic study, for every sentence uttered or written by anybody has either been learnt by heart in its entirety or else has been composed ( consciously or unconsciously ) from smaller units, each of which must one time have been learnt by heart. We may term primary matter all units learnt by heart integrally, and secondary matter all units built up or derived by the pupil from primary matter.

Chomsky firmly believes that language is divorced from other and earlier forms of thinking: each intellectual faculty is a separate domain, may be located in a separate region of the brain exhibiting many of its own processes and maturing at its own rate; and brain has its genetic timetable.

Memory plays a decisive role in language acquisition. Memory is an important function of human brain. It helps us in learning and performing our everyday responsibilities. Persons who have good memory have an advantage over those with poor retention power. It assumes the necessity for the development of this innate ability through proper exercises and sustained practice.

What the learners of language listen or read may not be recalled by them. The prerequisite for memorization is concentration which is different from remembering. The psychologists have distinguished between short term memory and long term memory. The former tends to preserve verbatim content as well as meaning, whereas the latter tends to preserve meaning. In other words, the more the learners have had to work on an utterance, the less they have of its form and more they of its meaning. There is a fundamental factor behind the production of any linguistic item, irrespective of the length or the complexity of such items. It is believed that one's language production comes not at ease. In fact, the speaker has to work meticulously before production. Words, phrases, patterns and structures must be selected keeping in view meaning, focus and end weight. If the speaker wants deliver a prolific discourse the conceptual level semantic structures should interact with the linguistic structures. In some cases, the items used are simply drawn from memory, though memorizing is difficult and in other cases, they are thoughtfully combined from different items already memorized.

In remembering, one retrieves bits and pieces of from memory in order to reconstruct sentences and this depends on the depth of processing and focus of processing and these complement each other. By focusing on the different aspects of a sentence, the learner recalls the sentence differently and focus involves depth of processing. In addition to it, learners' knowledge of situations, customs, cultural help him or her fill in many details in the reconstruction process.

One of the prerequisites of language learning is the capacity to process and produce sentences. By memorizing number of model sentences, and using simple substitutions this capacity can be strengthened. When the maternal language users use constructions such as *Wouldn't it be better if you took part in the conference*, they are not conscious of its parts. Because, they are part and

parcel of their primary data and they have obtained it having tried the said pattern in similar situations. The maternal language users are able to divide the sentence into thought groups and their pauses are appropriate. And, they know as a matter of habit that in this construction the use of past tense refers to the present time and that of the past perfect tense the past time. For, the said construction made of their primary matter and the knowledge not to use *taked* as past tense for *take* constitutes their secondary matter.

If the language learner has rich stockpile of primary matter, for him or her nothing can be simple or complex units or phrases or syntactic patterns, provided, they are incorporated as fundamental units. Incorporating the fundamental units by memorizing them rather than by inference serves certain advantages to the learners. It both safeguards them against the possibility of committing errors and saves them from the arduous abstract calculations involving rules and exceptions in grammar. In addition to it, the linguistic material learnt by memorizing is ready for immediate and authentic utility. Learners who are in the linguistic habit of speaking sentences such as *I always listen to devotional songs* will never say *I always listen devotional songs*, nor will they say *I listen always to devotional songs*. Since, they have attained certain amount of immunity against committing errors by incorporating the fundamental units. But, an artificial construction of a sentence such as *Wouldn't it be better, if you took part in the conference?* involves the application of certain rule-governed inferences, which in turn will involve a lot of efforts of the mind and also chances on the part of the learners falling victims to committing errors. These kinds of constructions are learnt through the process of memorizing as a primary matter serves as model sentences as well as a substitution for the future use. In learning patterns such as *Wouldn't it be better, if you took part in the conference* as fundamental units the learners reasoning ability, inference, analysis will be vain.

If language users try to construct aforementioned artificial sentences the following erroneous constructions are possible.

- *Would it be better, if you take part in the conference?*
- *Wouldn't it be better, if you to take part in the conference*

- Would it be better for you to took part in the conference
- Wouldn't it be better if you taken part in the conference
- Would it be better, if you have taken part in the conference?
- Would not be better if you take part the conference
- Would it not be better, if you took part in the conference?
- Would you better take part in the conference?
- Would not be better if you are to take part in the conference
- Wouldn't it be better if you can take part on the conference?
- Would it not be better if you will take part in the conference?
- Would not better if you if you took part in the conference.

The incorporation the fundamental units of has some advantages. They aid to provide total immunity against the possibility of errors and relief from the burden of abstract calculation and importantly it supports one to apply the incorporated matter immediately. When bringing out the significant is to master the structural elements, since it

leads to the creative use of language, Wilkins (1972, p. 71) asserts that Creative, not in the sense of literary creativity, but in the sense that most of the sentences we produce or hear are sentences that we have not produced or heard before. This is because, although the sentences are new they are made up of elements that are familiar- or, I would put it, they are the product of the application of familiar rules. There is no grammatical limit to the possibility of combining, re-combining, and repeating the structural elements of a language.

### References

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