

Experience and methodology keys to improving L2 Acquisition

Second language acquisition is a process of learning a second language in addition to the native language, and besides it is a discipline in applied linguistics which studies this process. There exist many ways to learn a language, but in fact a second language acquisition is something different, as this process is somehow similar to the one children undergo acquiring their native language (Stephen D Krashen, 1981). Reading books, watching movies and educational programs, writing letters or making dialogs – these are only some ways to learn a language, but what is more important in its acquisition?

Looking closer at the problem of learning a second language, English in particular, it is obvious, that for adults it is much harder to achieve native-like fluency in the second language than for children acquiring their first language, because their native language will always be the basement for understanding of structuring the sentences, combining words, and many other things, as before speaking we think, and thinking is closely connected with our native language. To think in another language is not so easy to learn, and most people translate their “native language thoughts” into the second language. That is why many mistakes in the second language are made due to the knowledge in our native language – pronunciation mistakes because our first language phonetics is different, wrong word order, and many others. Besides the more words you know – the better, but only if you know their combinatory possibilities; for this native speakers do not need any special training, but for the second language learners there is a lot to do to practice the usage of different words and their combinations, set expressions and other specific things in this language. Also important is the learner’s level of proficiency in the native language, his/her prior knowledge of the second language, and besides there can be many other factors which

can influence the learning process, as second language learners come from diverse backgrounds, and they have diverse skills, needs and motivation. For this many different methodologies were invented to help people acquire a second language, and it is important to define that “language acquisition” is not the same as learning, because it focuses more on the experiences of the learner with little formal training or teaching – in other words, naturalistic acquisition. Each methodology is based on a particular theory of language and language learning, and teaching practice; besides within methodology there are methods which are regarded fixed teaching systems with definite practices and techniques, and approaches – the variety of teaching ways in the classroom.

One of the best known experts in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development, is Stephen Krashen (University of Southern California), according to whose Acquisition-Learning distinction, “learning” is a conscious process resulting in conscious knowledge (e.g. knowledge of grammar rules) which is less important than “acquisition” - a subconscious process which requires natural communication. Besides, consciousness in second language learning and its role has been investigated on by other researchers as well, and they conclude that consciousness is essential for learning (Jan H. Hulstijn, Richard Schmidt, 1994).

There are also 4 more hypotheses in his theory of the second language acquisition, according to which there are definite factors which can influence the process of acquiring a second language and predetermine its success, such as individual peculiarities of the language learners, natural communicative input, ”natural order” in the acquisition of grammatical structures, high motivation, self-confidence and others. What is important for acquisition is a suitable environment which is created by the teacher and students’ participation - not text books and other

materials or facilities, but the way it is presented and how it is perceived by the learners (Stephen D Krashen, 1981).

So what methods and materials can help to improve the second language acquisition, especially when it concerns low-literate adults? There has been made a research into this problem through evaluation of the 2 programs with the help of adult education programs, schools teachers, researchers, students and the developers of the text *Sam and Pat*. And the key study was to test the effectiveness of the *Sam and Pat* program in improving English reading and language skills of low-literate adult ESL learners in comparison to the standard program of the control group, as *Sam and Pat* approach was considered a promising intervention for adult second language acquisition, providing opportunities for cooperative work, real world tasks, practice with feedback, and reading with much attention paid to literacy level of the students. According to the results produced by the study, there were no significant differences in outcomes in the two groups of students, though the approaches were not the same – in *Sam and Pat* group much attention was paid to reading, and the standard group was oriented on the language instructions.

With the help of such research reports we can clearly see that teaching and studying process requires much attention and precision, especially when it concerns acquisition of the second language. Here the goal is to make the learner not only be able to speak English, but to acquire the second language on the level as closer to its native speakers' as possible.

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