

LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE MOTHER TONGUE MODEL

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Language and the ability to communicate are important because of the complexities of the human interaction. Language acquisition, especially of the mother tongue is a natural process so to speak. But when it comes to the acquisition of other languages many of the learners, both the adult and the young seems to be slow. But by using the very natural processes of the mother tongue acquisition one can overcome this difficulty. In order to understand the natural processes involved in the mother tongue learning, it is necessary to see what the four modes of language expressions are. The four skills or modes of language expressions are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Mother tongue acquisition at least in the initial years of a person is not directly related with reading or writing. It is confined to the first two of the LSRW set, i.e. Listening and Speaking. In the same manner a second language should also be taught. In the initial stages of the language teaching, the main focus should be on the listening and speaking skills of the learners. This applies not just to children, but also to those adult learners who are newly learning a second language. Such kind of a language learning, which follows the patterns of the mother tongue learning process, is called as “The mother tongue model of Language learning”.

Key Words LSRW, The Mother Tongue Model, Language acquisition, natural processes.

Introduction

This paper is an attempt put forward a modified version of the direct method in language learning. This language learning model bases itself on the principles of first language or mother tongue acquisition. As it follows the strategies and patterns involved in the mother tongue learning, it is called Mother Tongue Model of Language Learning. The first few paragraphs would deal with language in general and then proceed to its definitions. The succeeding paragraphs deal with the Mother Tongue Model of Language Learning and the different methods used to put this model into practice.

Language

Language and the ability to communicate are important because of the complexities of the human interaction. Language is a tool that helps the human beings to communicate well with the other human beings. Can language be reduced to just a tool? To a certain extent it can be. But, without language, complex communications among the human race would not have been possible. All the human interactions are controlled and directed by the language and this renders it more than just a tool. It is necessary to understand in a better manner what language is and how it is acquired in order to find out a better model to teach and to learn language. The ideas

of a few prominent linguists about language would throw some light into the what and how of the language:

Language is a primarily human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.

Language may be defined as the expression of thought by means of speech sounds.

A system of communication by sound, i.e., through the organs of speech and hearing, among human beings of a certain group or community, using vocal symbols possessing arbitrary conventional meaning.

A language is a device that establishes sound-meaning correlations, pairing meanings with signals to enable people to exchange ideas through observable sequences of sound. (Prasad 1-2)

Language is a means for communication which is formed by the combination of various sounds and actions which may or may not have a proper visual symbol to represent that. Sounds refer not only to simple sounds but also to simple combination of sounds and further complex combination of these combined sounds. Thus either one sound or the combination of two or more sounds make up a word and, the combination of words in the proper manner makes up a sentence. The production of the basic sounds is the starting point of language speaking. But the listening part of the language learning happens before hand, as the children start to listen long before they begin to speak. "All normal infants are highly receptive to speech sounds even a few days after their birth. From the very beginning, children appear to discriminate speech from non-speech and seem to pay particular attention to the human voice as opposed to other environmental sounds." (Prasad 264)

The Mother Tongue Model of Language Learning

Language acquisition, especially of the mother tongue is a natural process so to speak. But when it comes to the acquisition of languages other than the mother tongue, many of the learners, both the adult and the young, seems to face challenges. But by using the very natural processes of the mother tongue acquisition one can overcome this difficulty. In order to understand the natural processes involved in the mother tongue learning, it is necessary to see what the four modes of language expressions are. The four skills or modes of language expressions are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Mother tongue acquisition at least in the initial years of a person is not directly related with reading or writing. It is confined to the first two of the LSRW set, i.e. Listening and Speaking. Another fact is that it is not an other-person-induced-learning-process but rather a self-induced-learning-process. So the Mother Tongue Model of the Language Learning focuses on a language learning process and modality which tries to bring about similar situations which brought about the learning of the first language or the mother tongue.

The same strategies and tools used in the learning of the first language are used to teach and learn a second language. In this model at least in the initial stages of the language teaching and learning, the main focus should be on the listening and speaking skills of the learners. This applies not just to children, but also to those adult learners who are newly learning a second language. Such kind of a language learning, which follows the patterns of the mother tongue learning process, is called as "The mother Tongue Model of Language Learning". The

following elements or methods are part and parcel of mother tongue learning and thus they are some of the methods to be used in the Mother Tongue Model of Language Learning.

1. Recreational method

It is easier for a child to learn a language as it does not consider language learning as a task (Prasad 266). For a child, language learning is a recreational activity. Children like to play games as it involves so much fun and enjoyment. It addresses the pleasure seeking mechanism of the human beings. I have an example for this kind of task-recreation difference from my life itself. I often think of my experience of reading. When I was a boy I used to read a lot of adminbooks and it was a craze for me. I used to read novels, short stories, autobiographies and the like. I remember myself having read the whole Mahabharata in one night. But later on when I had various novels as topics to learn it became a boring activity and in place of the one-day for-one-book habit I had to spent lot of time to complete one book.

The recreational or hobby method would help the second language learners to get out of the thought that language learning is a heavy task that has to be completed. Various games can be incorporated in the language learning process to make it more of a fun activity than a tiresome task to be completed.

2. Imitational method

The second method that is used in the Mother Tongue Model is in line with the idea of the empiricists who “argue that the source of knowledge is experience. According to them, children begin their learning by imitating, copying and repetition. This method prompts the learners to imitate the language patterns by playing audios of dialogues, conversations and words.

3. Trial and error method

The mother tongue is learned through a trial and error method. Children utter certain words, sentences etc. Most often they would be uttering incomplete words and sentences. Parents or the elders at home correct their language formulations. In the same manner it is the duty of the educator to correct them by teaching precise pronunciations and sentence constructions.

4. Flash card method

Parents or elders point out certain things to the child and names them. The child tries to recollect what they have learned from their parents. In a second language class room too this technique can be used. Either the teacher can take the students to real life situations to teach them or show them flash cards of different words and sentences. As the Mother Tongue Model focuses mainly on the listening and speaking skills of the LSRW skill set, the flash cards will contain only the pictures of the words and event based sentences.

5. Artificial linguistic setting method.

A child assimilates its mother tongue from a linguistic setting. Linguistic setting refers to a real life context in which the language is used for communication. To create a real life situation for the second language learners is not that easy. So an artificial linguistic setting should be created.

Conclusion

The Mother Tongue Model of Language Learning can be put into practice using the five methods mentioned above. This model of language learning is effective in providing the learners with a working knowledge of the language. This kind of learning is restricted to the Speaking and Listening skills of the LSRW set. Just like children of very young age are able to converse well in their mother tongue even before they go to school for formal education, a second language learner can also acquire a second language.

Works Cited

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