Research Paper

A Comparative Study on Specific Practices of Learning English beyond the Classroom by ESL Intermediate Advanced Learner; A Sri Lankan Sociolinguistic Approach.

[1]Wijesekara Mudiyanselage Sumith Dananjaya,
[2]Ebenezer Breman Veerasingam

[1](Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University Sri Lanka)
[2](Department of Languages and Communication Studies, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University Sri Lanka /
Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom)
Corresponding Author:Ebenezer Breman Veerasingam

ABSTRACT: Taking Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, this qualitative research study focusses on the specific ways in which Sri Lankan intermediate level second language learners find exposure and extra-linguistic features beyond the target language learning classrooms to improve their language competency. While considering the background of two university students in the Sri Lankan state universities, the study carefully contrasts their second language competency level against their efforts beyond classrooms to learn the target language.

KEYWORDS: Second language learning, beyond classrooms, extra-linguistic features, Stephen Krashen, Albert Bandura, Sri Lanka, English language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

After interviewing several numbers of ESL intermediate-level students, it was possible to identify that there are specific ways in which they learn English beyond the classroom. Most of these ways are likely to depend on which social background where they are born and brought up(Bacanlı, 2016; Dekeyser, 2009; Stajkovic & Sergent, 2019). For instance, a student from a rural village may not have the opportunity that an urban student has to learn English by listening to his/her parents since rural parents' proficiency level of English is usually far more below that of urban parents. On the other hand, a boy from an environment where many tourists travel (ex; beach boys) may have better speaking skills than a rural boy even though his social background is not as respected as an urban learner.

A student's social background is a key factor in deciding which method they learn English effectively beyond the school classroom. However, two ESL intermediate-level students enrolled in the same degree course in a state university have been selected for this comparative study. While almost all the interviewees providedseveral ways to impress the researcher, the selected couple of students surprised him with how they manipulated themselves to learn English.Abiding by the lines of Krashen, the opinion is that children acquire their first language instead of learning it(Krashen, 2013; Thomas, 2016). Right from their days as babies, children acquire their first language, or rather 'pick up' with a subconscious process.

The entire process is different with learning a second language. When it comes to foreign language learning, it is arguable that this acquisition is replicated by the teaching process in the target language itself, therefore, an avenue of 'comprehensible input is provided. With the determined conclusions, this suggestion gets prominence that "language lessons should be taught as far as possible in the target language and not in the native language" (Payne, 2011). However, without the contribution of the target language input, the opportunities that come further in the language learning process are diminished. This relates to Krashen's first part of the input hypothesis. The whole language acquisition process becomes possible only when the learner understands the input.'Structure' becomes another critical factor in understanding Krashen's input-language hypothesis. The process of language acquisition requires extra-linguistic information that would help the learner go beyond the

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regular competence level(Krashen, 2013). The language learning process thus requires extra-linguistic features so that the learning competence goes beyond various set standards and limitations. Taking language learning beyond the classroom settings and limitations is a challenge on one side, and the other is to enable more extra-linguistic features and provide exposure to students who will be able to utilise the opportunities as frameworks for the betterment and would take forward the learning process by various means of learning-enriching factors(Alderson et al., 1997; Elder & Ellis, 2009; Izquierdo et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016). Focusing through this ideological lens towards a Sri Lankan perspective is vital as the country's English language learning methods look forward towards development and enabling conditions. There have been significant studies based on the comparative and detailed studies on this subject (Himanshi & Wijeratne; Little et al., 2019), while some of the studies have looked explicitly into variables that influence the language learning procedures (Perera, 2001; Samaranayake, 2016). Counting the detailed studies that have already made a significant mark on this area of research, this study aims at finding some of the crucial aspects that the second language learners in Sri Lanka have focussed on in order to find extra-linguistic features that have positively enabled and facilitated this essential need of learning a second language.

II. SAMPLE

Participant A is from a rural village in the Monaragala District, and the B was born and brought up in the Colombo suburbs. Both were selected for the university through one of the most challenging examinations in the country, the G.C.E. A/L examination. The samples provedsuitable for the study as their upbringing have contrasting backgrounds and the access to a second language, in this case, English, was for varying purposes. The samples have the potential to respond to the researcher's questions from different perspectives as their exposure to the language and the chances of expressing ideas and thoughts in the target language were different.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The possibilities of analysing each learning way through the theories of Stephen Krashen's learning/acquisition hypothesis (Krashen, 2013)and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory(Bandura, 1977) have been sought out throughout this study. In other words, a couple of questions are answered; 1. Does the learner acquire the second language through mutual interaction by living in an atmosphere where the particular language is actively used? 2. Does he/she create a behavioural change of language learning through observation, imitating, and modelling the other language users?After interviewing both participants, the following ways of learning English were identified.Krashen's theories provide a surface opinion of interest and meaning to those who teach languages where they are able to see a framework to progress further in the learning-facilitating process. However, the notion of 'i + 1' via comprehensible input seems to raise questions that need further evaluation on the said ideas. Referring to data that is available on this question, it is illuminating to realise that the analysis proves that planned and adapted acquisition evolves into structured learning, a transition that would project against Krashen's ideology.Even though Krashen's theory seems to be recognisable, the facts may vary in the real classroom environment of learning languages(Payne, 2011).On the other hand, Albert Bandura negotiates the suggestion that learning has observation and modelling as its primary roles when people learn. Bandura gives prominence to the environment in which someone is learning, and that the experience in that environment matters the most. According to Bandura, learning can take place by observing others behave. He believes that most of the behavioural aspects of humans are learned through observation while having others as models. The observation of others paves the way for an individual to understand how new behaviours are performed and later this becomes the initiation for later behaviours of the learner and this coded information provides for a guide for next action(Bandura, 1977).

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Watching English movies with/without subtitles

Participant B said that he watches English movies without subtitles since he believes he has a fundamental skill of identifying the sounds of English. He could at least identify and understand three words in a sentence spoken in a film. Following the principle of 'from known to unknown', he tries to guess the meaning of the other words in sentences without looking at a dictionary. When needed, he stops and backwards the movie to understand certain sections. His understanding is supported by the visual images supplied in the movie. As Krashen mentioned in his monitor model, this is known as language acquisition which is the learner acquires the language by being in an atmosphere where the particular language is spoken. In English movies, it is usually the native speakers of English who actively interact with each other in authentic situations. Thus the learner develops strong listening skills and learns new words contextually even though he is not a part of the conversation. This goes with the input hypothesis since the learner acquires one step above his linguistic competence at each time he comes across a never-heard word. Following the opposite direction, Participant A watches English movies with subtitles as he believes he does not have much vocabulary to understand the

language spoken in movies. Having subtitles improve two macro skills; listening and reading with vocabulary development.

Watching news and Cricket matches

Participant B watches English news daily and develops his listening skill and vocabulary in integration. He receives a video clip of the nighttime news of a popular news channel in Sri Lanka each day before bed. He has a habit of watching this 30 minutes news video and understands the news by following the same principle as he understands films. How formal spoken utterances are made in different contexts by using appropriate grammar and vocabulary is observed in the news. Participant A does not habitually watch English news; rather, he is addicted to watching cricket matches. That creates an atmosphere where he receives authentic language input. There are usually two commentators in a cricket match, and their dialogues are more conversational. Being a long-term addict of this habit, now he knows certain conversational patterns of cricket like, you know, having said that, whatever said and done, nail-bitter, etc.

Having hobbies; Travelling and Umpiring

Travelling is participant B's favourite hobby. A person is involved in a hobby for the purpose of pleasure and interest. When something is done with pleasure, the gain is massive. His travelling to international locations makes him learn a lot of English. During his various tours, he has crossed a lot of airports and immigration departments in the world. He has to communicate in English in such instances. Listening and speaking skills are authentically tested on those occasions and he acquires the language in its functional aspects. Bandura's theory can be mapped here since he observes his father communicating with the airport officers without any communication barriers. This behaviour influences participant B's speaking attitude positively. During these tours, he has to call hotels and book their rooms in advance. For that purpose, he has to speak in English and listen properly to the information provided by the callee. In this case, also, He is exposed to an authentic language situation and acquires it by being in such an environment. In such situations, he learns to greet over the phone, make the request, cancel a booking, etc. When he travels to places like national parks, tropical rain forests, zoos, museums, etc. he experiences many English materials. Usually, instructions, guidelines, explanations, and narrated explanations of those places are provided in English. Leaflets, books, papers, and magazines are in English, and learning new vocabulary through reading is huge here. He has a dictionary downloaded on his smartphone to use in such instances. He mentioned a verbal explanation given by a guide about a famous fortress in London. He said that he had to have certain listening skills to grasp such discourse. This again reminds Krashen's i + 1 theory since the learner acquires a new linguistic input if it is above his current linguistic competence.

As same as participant B, A also has an exciting hobby which makes him learn an incredible amount of English. His hobby is umpiring cricket matches. He has been doing this from his A/L, and now that he attends workshops and training sessions in umpiring, which are conducted in English. These sessions are audio-recorded on his phone, and he listens to them leisurely at home. This seems to be an exemplary technique for improving vocabulary and listening skills.

Listening to people who speak English

One of the most highlighted things that participant B does to improve his listening and speaking skills is listening to the speakers of English around him. He has this atmosphere even at home since both his parents are government servants and speaks English. Hence, participant B listens to these dialogues and identifies how they handle the language in speaking. This includes turn-taking, hesitation markers, pillars, etc. This is another situation where he is exposed to the real communicative function of language. Suppose there is an opportunity for him also to involve in the conversation. Even though participant A does not have an opportunity to be exposed to parents speaking at his home, he is very much alert when people speak in English outside the home. This can be in a supermarket, mobile phone arcade, pharmacy, shopping complex, etc.

Doing part-time jobs

The other significant opportunity that participant A has is his part-time job. He works in a seaside restaurant which has a tourist attraction. He helps the chef with cooking and gets the opportunity to serve the customers on and off. There, he gets to speak to foreigners in English, improving his speaking and listening skills. Understanding the orders placed and correct communication with them is vital here.

Using smart devices; phones, tablets, laptops, etc.

One of the common answers received from both participants to the question of how they learn English beyond the classroom is that they learn English in information-technology-related social situations. This includes how they operate their smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc. Both A and B mentioned that the language of

the operating systems of these devices is English. These operating systems have made them too serious in understanding English since failure to understand and respond to the system messages would make the devices disorder. They need to know a certain amount of English to save a phone number. Therefore, whenimportant system messages appear on their screens, they refer to a dictionary and get the meanings of unknown words. Until both of them become familiar with these system messages, this learning process has been continuous, and learning many IT-related vocabularies is the result. Participant A has a smartphone with an Android operating system, and the B possesses an apple notebook and an iPhone.

Being an active user of social media platforms

It was also important to note that both these undergraduates learn English through social media platforms. A is a user of WhatsApp, Viber, and Facebook, and he has a separate WhatsApp group where he communicates with his batchmates in English. Announcements of the lecturers, timetables and official news are getting shared and responded to in English in this common group. He mentioned that he is extracareful in sending a message to this group since it is seen in everyone in the batch. Therefore he edits the same message several times before sending it. This unconsciously improves his writing skills.

On the other hand, participant B is a user of Facebook. He has developed a network of friends from different parts of the world. Most of them are native speakers of English, and they are connected through Facebook video calls. He speaks with them for hours and hours in terms of improving his speaking skills. He mentioned that he could not understand the stuff they spoke at the beginning. Nevertheless, he has strategically overcome this by recording theirs calls and listening to those later with a slower phase. Now that he is even making group video calls among his friends of native speakers of English. This creates language interaction with them and participant B acquires the second language by being in a virtual community where that particular language is spoken. This phenomenon fits with Stephen Krashen's learning/acquisition hypothesis, and he creates an acquisition-friendly language environment through video calls. Even though the effort of creating a large network of friends was intentional at the beginning, he is now unintentionally exposed to a lot of second language learning input, which native speakers produce through video calls. He has used the Facebook video calling option to improve his speaking skills and ELT Facebook pages. According to his statement, he has liked several English Language Teaching pages to get English lessons twice a week. These lessons are categorised according to four macro skills of language; Listening, Speaking, Reading, and writing. He is not very much bothered about listening and speaking skills since he has subscribed to several YouTube channels to get those skills improved. Thus, he does a couple of reading and writing activities once a week, and his writing are improving gradually, according to the sample writings provided on the same Facebook pages. These writing activities fit into his level of English as he has carefully selected these pages by spending considerable time on them. Therefore the content he writes most of the time matches what he studies in the university, media studies. Participant B does not have an opportunity to get his writing marked by the Facebook pages. For this purpose, he has to go for the peer review option. That is, he brings his writings to a peer batchmate whom he thinks has better English knowledge than him and gets them corrected. He believes that his friend is with the potential to correct his papers since they are studying the same media degree. Unless there is an urgent assignment to be submitted, this has been happening throughout his two years of university life. He says that this has helped improve his writing skills.

Regarding reading skills, he does not need a peer to correct them since answer keys are given on the Facebook page. The only thing he has to do is to be honest to himself at the time of answering and correct them with the answer keys provided. These reading materials are authentic and, most of the time, media discourses. Hence he comes across many new vocabularies which will be helpful to him in his future career as a journalist. He indeedhas to answer the reading activities within the stipulated time given on the Facebook page, but he never forgets to learn the meanings of unknown words in the reading text soon after the activity by taking screenshots.

On the contrary, it is hardly noticeable that participant A learns English from Facebook. He utilises it to be in touch with friends and social situations and has not liked any educational pages on his Facebook account. However, he noted that he sometimes browses through the web pages that provide LSRW materials for students to practice. How participant B improves his listening and speaking skills through social media is fascinating. He does this through YouTube channels and subscribes to more than three YouTube channels where he weekly gets listening activities and authentic speaking materials. While an authentic piece of listening audio is being played in the background, he has to simultaneously answer the questions on the screen that are based on the audio clip. These clips are taken from a radio station, announcements, interviews, news reading, etc. He says he still finds these listening activities difficult since native speakers of English speak them. What is important here is his strong determination to get a good mark for listening in the future. His improvement can be seen by tracing his marks throughout the previous months.

V. CONCLUSION

It is an identifiable fact that ESL intermediate learners in Sri Lanka have multiple opportunities to learn the language beyond the classroom and these learning features and facilities have positively influenced the learners. These opportunities seem to be decided by the social situations/conditions where the learner is growing up. A successful learner is tactful in learning the language in whatever way he/she finds out.These features of extra-linguistic inputs that have positively influenced the second language learning process also have the potential of being established as effective methods for second language learning. This establishment needs further empirical studies that would also propose the most suitable ways of providing exposure to Sri Lankan second language learners. Even though Sri Lankan homes do not have the opportunity to provide the necessary and equal exposure to a second language to a child, it is also observable that the children, as they grow and find further avenues of linguistic and technological exposure, it becomes a possibility for them to address this need by finding various means of available facilities to progress in this learning process.

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