

STAGES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN THE NATURAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

KHATTAK, I.; ASRAR, M. Stages of language acquisition in the natural approach to language teaching. **Sarhad J. Agric.** v. 23,n. 1, p. 251-255, 2007.

Summary by Simone Freire de Araujo (TEAM member). Jan. 10, 2021.

In his 2007 article “Stages of language acquisition in the Natural Approach to language teaching” Ibrahim Khattak and M. Asrar report a research about the learning process of second language learners based on the Natural Approach. The Natural Approach to the acquisition of a second language consists of three principles: “(1) the classroom activities must



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foster acquisition; (2) no correction of speech errors directly; and (3) the students can respond in either the target language, their native language, or a mixture of the two” (p. 251). The important aspects in the acquisition process are the activities that promote the development of the learners’ knowledge.

Acquisition

In foreign language classes, learners face many situations in which to practice their abilities during the activities, so their teachers should provide many opportunities for the students to acquire language in class. It is very important, because these activities help students to develop communication skills in a foreign language. In this article, Khattak and Asrar mention Krashen’s Monitor Hypothesis, according to which learners activate their inner editor, making corrections in the phrases/sentences after initiating their speech. Language has rules that affect the acquisition process, so learners should know the rule and have time to think about it in order to use it appropriately.

Pointing out the importance of cognitive approaches, Khattak and Asrar state that for such approaches, there are three important techniques involved: explanation, practice, and application. They quote Chastain to explain that “the learning of a grammatical

principle can precede its acquisition. Whether it facilitates acquisition probably depends on the learning style of acquirer” (CHASTAIN, 1976, p. 252)¹. The rules are better understood through use, and also, it all depends on each student’s learning style.

Khattak and Asrar add in their research that there are three essential conditions to communication: (1) focus on the message; (2) understanding the message; (3) having a low-anxiety atmosphere in the learning situation.

They also point out that the Natural approach “uses three activities, which correspond to three stages of language instruction for beginners. They are: (1) comprehension (preproduction); (2) early speech production; (3) speech emergence” (p. 253):

Comprehension (preproduction)

In this stage, the first moment of comprehension is very important for beginners in a new language. So, according to a Natural Approach perspective, teachers perform the actions when they are speaking or explaining the activities, using guessing games with the vocabulary items, and other techniques to help their learners.

Early Speech production

Early speech production is the stage when learners show their acquired knowledge. They use only words or answers already seen in class, for example: “What is your name?”, “How are you?”. Also, in this moment students use the Monitor Hypothesis to correct their errors.

Speech Emergence

This stage depends on the goals of the course, and also on the learners’ own goals, because the focus, in this stage, is always the content of communication, and not the form.

Games and Recreation Activities

“Games have always been used to focus the learners on what they are doing and use the language as a tool for reaching the goal (participating in the game) rather than as a goal itself” (p.254).

Content

In a new language some content is used to explore cultural information. Such as culture similarities, history of the country or peoples who speak the language. Also, materials such as slide presentations and pictures are supposed to be used to show the content.

¹Chastain, K. D. **Developing second language skills**. Chicago: RandMcNally, 1976.

Humanistic-Affective Activities

In these activities, the focus is on the message, not on the form of the language. Learners' experiences, values, and feelings are included in the activities.

Information and Problem-Solving Activities

Learners are given a problem which they need to solve. So, with these activities students get prepared for different situations of communication out of the context of classroom. "Comprehension is the skill which promotes acquisition and should precede speech production. Production (speech and writing) is not taught directly, but rather emerges in stages from response by gestures to complete discourse" (p.255).

Conclusion

Although the Natural Approach has as its main principle the development of the ability to communicate, it encompasses the teaching and learning of grammar. Also, comprehension promotes acquisition and should precede speech production. Production (speech and writing) is not taught directly, but rather emerges in stages: from response by gestures to complete discourse.

