

## The role of psycholinguistics in foreign language learning and teaching

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### Abstract

Psycholinguistics is a field that has provided numerous theories to explain how a person acquires, produces and perceives both spoken and written language. These theories have been used in the field of language teaching as the basic theories in developing language teaching methods. Psycholinguistic approach views learning as a cognitive individual process happening within the individual and then moves to the social dimension. Some methods which were developed based on psycholinguistics theories are natural method, total physical response method, and suggestopedia method. These methods apply psycholinguistic principles that how a person acquires his/her mother tongue or first language (First Language Acquisition), learns his/her second or third language (Second Language Learning), perceives a language (Language Perception), and produces language (Language Production). Psycholinguistics helps to understand the difficulties of these four skills both intrinsic difficulties and extrinsic difficulties. Psycholinguistics also helps to explain the errors students do in the language learning. Moreover psycholinguistics also defines some kinds of brain disorders that affect language learning performance such as agraphia and aphasia which must be treated properly.

**Keywords:** Psycholinguistics, foreign language, Learning. Teaching

### Introduction

Psycholinguistics has provided numerous theories that explain how a person acquires a language, produces and perceives both spoken and written language. The theories have been used in the field of language teaching. Some experts use them as the basic theories in developing language teaching methods. It is known as psycholinguistics approach. Psycholinguistic approach views learning as a cognitive individual process happening within the individual and then moves to the social dimension. As an approach, there are some methods which were developed based on psycholinguistics theories such as natural method, total physical response method, and suggestopedia method. These methods apply psycholinguistic principles that how a person acquires his/her mother tongue or first language (First Language Acquisition), learns his/her second or third language (Second Language Learning), perceives a language (Language Perception), and produces language (Language Production). Language perception refers to listening and reading, while the language production refers to speaking and writing. Listening, reading, speaking and writing are called as the four of language skills. Specifically,

psycholinguistics helps to understand the difficulties of these four skills both intrinsic difficulties and extrinsic difficulties. Psycholinguistics also helps to explain the errors students do in the language learning. Moreover psycholinguistics also defines some kinds of brain disorders that affect language learning performance such as agraphia and aphasia which must be treated properly. Psycholinguistics mainly helps teachers to consider the use of appropriate method to teach that four language skill. (Purpa,2018).

### **Psycholinguistics Approach**

No child fails to learn a native tongue and it is mainly learned before the age of five. Children are not taught language formally, but they all reach the same level of proficiency in using their native tongue by the time schools begins. Therefore psycholinguistics approach supports the idea that language acquisition is innately determined and it is rewired by birth since both acquisition and improvement in language are a biological process. Acquiring a language requires perception skills, cognition abilities, and other mechanism that are related with language. Students are considered as people that always involve the three domains of psychology -cognitive, affective, and psychomotor- in their daily activities. The ability to use both receptive language (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) involving the three domains earlier. The forms of language are organized in the mind of human beings with interdependent connection of memory, perception, thought, meaning, and emotion (Demirezen, 2004).

Psycholinguistic approaches to language learning conceive language learning as a cognitive and individual process in which knowledge is constructed as the learner is (1) exposed to comprehensible input, (2) is given opportunities to both, negotiate, and (3) receive negative feedback. Psycholinguistic approaches to language learning tend to agree that a learner needs to be exposed to input (Carlos, 2008). One of the most widely studied theories of input is Krashen's input hypothesis (1985). This theory predicts the likelihood for a learner to acquire a language when he/she is exposed to comprehensible input.

Thus, to increase the chances for input comprehension, input should be just one step beyond the learner's current stage of linguistic competence. The interaction hypothesis asserts that besides the input the learner is exposed to, manipulation of such input through interaction is what forms the basis for language development. According to Long (1997) input comprehensibility increases as learners interact and use different type of interactional modifications (comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests) to overcome communication breakdowns. Long's work sparked interest among the so-called interactions who turned their research agendas to examine how speakers modify their speech and interaction patterns to allow their interlocutors to participate, understand, and keep the flow of conversations.

The psycholinguistics approach focuses upon what humans know when they talk and how they acquire that knowledge and how that knowledge is put to use. Matlin (1994) states that the central approach of psycholinguistics theory is how people learn a language biologically and what transformational rules that enable people understand the language. This means that developmentally appropriate instruction must be considered in language learning.

### **A. Psycholinguistics Approach and Four Language Skills**

Psycholinguistics theories have explained the mental processes that occur in human brain during a person produces and perceives a language. Language perception includes the activity of listening and reading, while the language production includes the activity of speaking and writing. The four activities are called as the four of language skills. Following will be described some benefits of psycholinguistics theories in language learning and teaching as explained by Demirezen (2004). **1. Psycholinguistics Approach and Listening Skill**

Psycholinguistics researchers have indicated that in teaching listening, the intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties should be overcome in order to reach to a highly qualified listening activity. Intrinsic difficulty refers to the speed of the speech, number of unknown words, and prior knowledge about topic. Extrinsic difficulty refers to students' interest, motivation, purpose of listening activity, and noise in the environment. Psycholinguistics knowledge will help teacher to reduce the intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties. Teacher can prepare a listening text with topic that is familiar for students, consisting of 100 words, and including 10 new vocabulary items. Teacher also minds about the reading speed and the noise of environment. Moreover, teacher can increase students' interest and motivation by designing an interesting and comfortable class.

### **2. Psycholinguistics Approach and Reading Skill**

Psycholinguistics approach resorts to text-based approach as a case of bottom-up processing so as to emphasize the comprehension activity and top-down processing to stress the fact that comprehension rests primarily on students' knowledge base. Bottom-up processing happens when someone tries to understand language by looking at individual meanings or grammatical characteristics of the most basic units of the text and moves from these to trying to understand the whole text. Top-down processing of language happens when someone uses background information to predict the meaning of language they are going to read to. Rather than relying first on the actual words, they develop expectations about what they will read, and confirm or reject these as they read. This theory emphasizes that the understanding the meaning of a text essentially rests on the prior knowledge of students. Psycholinguistics helps learners to reduce the intrinsic difficulties in reading activity by arousing the interest of the students onto the reading text. Teachers need to provide authentic and contextual reading material because if

students are not properly exposed to authentic materials they may fail in seeing their relevance to the real world.

### **3. Psycholinguistics Approach and Writing Skill**

Psycholinguistics helps in understanding the students' mistakes in writing. It has a clear contribution on spelling mistakes since in English words are not spelled as they sound. There is a hardship on this case because storing of the spelling of words and retrieve them on demand is very difficult. Psycholinguistics approach indicates that there are mistakes in writing caused by graphic, which must be treated properly. Psycholinguistics helps to find interesting topic to write. It serves to decrease the level of the difficulties in writing. It helps to specify the writing levels and writing types. It pins down the mechanic mistakes on punctuation and suggests certain cures for them.

#### **4. Psycholinguistics Approach and Speaking Skill**

Psycholinguistic approach has a workable control over the field of teaching speaking as a skill. It has specified several difficulties on speaking such as students' oriented difficulty. Psycholinguistics also explains that personality, like introvert and extrovert students, affects students' performance in language learning. Speaking defects like voice disorders, stuttering, and disarticulation are also psychological in origin caused by personality factor. There are also some traumatic disorders such as aphasia and autism caused by localized in damage. It is recommend therapies and counseling practices for such difficulties. Thus, the investigations of psycholinguistic approach have provided solutions for almost each type of language learning difficulty. With the knowledge, teachers can apply the appropriate techniques to teach speaking skills by considering the condition of the learner and find interesting topics to be discussed in speaking class.

### **Psycholinguistics and foreign Language Teaching**

The basic status of the psycholinguistic approach has always been disregarded in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, is a matter of fact, this field of study is the first initiator of the area of foreign language teaching and learning. The psycholinguistic approach has provided the theoretical ground for the flourishing of many second language learning theories and methods (Demirezen, 2004). It is here that we see interconnection between psycholinguistics and language teaching over the years. Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) characterize three principal dimensions for language teaching methods:

- a- language focus: speech communication and vs. literature.
- b- meaning learning: direct experience vs. translation, and
- c- grammar learning: induction vs. explication.

This three dimensional characterization includes theories which have been realized in principal foreign language teaching methods. Richards and Rogers (2002) say that methods of teaching derive from

theoretical models of language and learning. The former is the concern of linguistics, and the latter the concern of psychology. According to the changes of method during the different periods of time, they can be categorized into three groups: a) traditional methods, b) short-lived, and c) contemporary methods. However, the deep detail such as teaching features and techniques will not be mentioned due to the nature of the article and its limitations. Language Teaching Methods of Psycholinguistics Approach An approach in language teaching consists of theories of the nature of language and the theories of language learning. Language teaching methods are concretization of language teaching approaches. A method of language teaching can be well understood if its fundamental theories are clearly understood. Fundamental theories in developing language teaching methods are divided into two main theories; the theory of language and the theory of language learning.

There are three fundamental theoretical views in developing the language teaching method. structural theory, functional theory, and interactional theory. Structural theory views language as a system of grammatical unit: phrases, clauses, sentences, affixes, and soon. Functional theory views language from its function as a mean of communication: informational, emotional, persuasive, and social. Interactional theory views language as a mean to realize interpersonal relationship and as a performance of social transaction between individual and society. Each view implicates differently in the development of language teaching method. Beside the theory of language, the developing of language teaching method is also based on the theory of language learning that related to two main questions;

(1) what cognitive process that involved in language learning, and (2) what condition are needed to reach a high quality of language learning activity.

Psycholinguistics has clearly answered these two questions. Therefore, psycholinguistics has been used widely as fundamental theory in developing language teaching method.

### **The Role of Teachers' Psycholinguistic awareness on Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

Psycholinguistics is concerned with how a person acquires a language, produces and perceives both spoken and written language. Moreover, Psycholinguistics is a branch of cognitive science and one of the major issues of cognitive science is "mind". Knowing what interactions in the memory of the learner will happen when teaching foreign languages, what problems will happen in the process of memorization; and how can be helpful the educators and designers of instructional books and facilitate and accelerate the process of teaching and learning foreign languages. Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to overview psycholinguistic awareness and its contributions on English language learning Review of the related literature is the theoretical background which consists of psycholinguistics, speech comprehension and production. These theories were used as guidance in conducting this research. This paper also attempts to critically and profoundly present the role of teachers' awareness in psycholinguistics and its implications and pedagogic contributions to the area of language learning

and teaching, in an endeavor to shed light on the current successful and influential practices in this area of research which are incremental teaching and learning foreign language.

### **Psycholinguistics**

The beginning of psycholinguistics as an independent discipline became very important for traditional psycholinguistics world which dates from the 1950s (Griffin and Ferreira, 2006). There are many definitions of psycholinguistics. Scovel (1998:23) defines psycholinguistics as “the use of language and speech as representation of the nature and structure of the human mind” . It means that the issue of language and human mind will not be separated from the issue of psychological and neurobiological factors that enable humans to acquire, use, learning, and understand language. Field (2003) defines psycholinguistics as a relationship between human mind and language or thought and language. psycholinguistics sees language as a process which involves the comprehension, production, and learning of language. Psycholinguistics can be defined as the study of mind and language since it is an integration of two disciplines; psychology and linguistics. Psychology is much more concerned with the study of mind and behavior; linguistics is concerned with the study of language. (Maftoon, 2012).

### **Speech Comprehension and Production**

Psycholinguistics is concerned with describing how humans“ brain compute and process thoughts to comprehend and produce language. According to Harley (2001:19), comprehension is the stage of processing involving word recognition and parsing. Griffin and Ferreira (2006) asserts that any meaningful utterance that people produce consists of a single word expressing a single idea. This process is called conceptualization or message planning. Then, they, select a word from their lexicon based on its correspondence to semantic and pragmatic specifications. After selecting the word that will express the thought, the speaker comes to sound processing stage. This stage involves constructing the phonological form of a selected word. Then the speaker tries to retrieve individual sounds of the word and manage them into stressed and unstressed syllables. The two stages are called formulation because the speakers determine how to express their thought. The final process is articulation in which motor programs are used to pronounce the sounds of a word. The most accepted model of language production is that of Levelt (2013:157) Based on this model, speech goes through three levels.

1. Conceptualizer: Thoughts are formulated in a unit called conceptualizer. This means that the message is generated here but has no linguistic form yet – it may appear in pictures. .

2. Formulator: Where it will be grammatically and phonetically shaped. The Formulator is connected to the Lexicon, from where it takes the words and other units of expression.

3. Articulator: Message turns into speech.

## **The Role of Psycholinguistics in Language Teaching and Learning**

Alduais (2012) shows that the four of language skills Listening, reading, speaking and writing. Specifically, psycholinguistics helps to understand the difficulties of these four skills both intrinsic difficulties and extrinsic difficulties. Psycholinguistics also helps to explain the errors students do in the language learning Teaching and Learning are interdependent with psychology. Psychology is the study of human behavior while Teaching is the process of modifying human behavior. Both deal with human behaviour, but in different ways. Educational psychology deals with educational problems. Psychology has changed the spirit of education and given new meaning to learning in the classroom. Psychology changed the old concept of education where only upper class had the ability and right to learn. Learning is the basic topic of educational psychology. From the meaning of learning to the laws of learning, different topics have been highlighted by psychology. This has helped in making the process of education easy, interesting and pleasant. Psychology has given education the theory of individual differences which postulates that every child has different mental ability and learns at a different pace. Today, education psychology is considered the foundation of education.

Psychology helps Education in the following ways:

- Psychology suggests use of different methods in teaching learning process to achieve better results.
- Psychology gives emphasis to motivation and readiness in class room.
- Psychology has introduced new theories of learning in education.
- Psychology emphasizes activity – based teaching learning process.
- Psychology encourages the use of audio-visual aids in teaching learning process. .

## **Psychology and the Teacher**

Teacher should be a master of psychology to deal with a complex educational situation. Teaching is an art and so he should know different techniques of psychology in order to solve different problems of the children. If the teacher teaches his students according to the interest and mental development of the students, they will like it and will learn easily. The teacher should teach according to their mental level. Audio visual aids in the educational processes are also the result of educational psychology. Psychology helps the teacher to understand the learner, learning process and the learning situations. Psychology states that teacher should have sympathetic and affectionate attitude towards the learner. They should have genuine interest in the teaching profession. <http://www.publishyourarticles.net/knowledge-ub/education/what-is-the-relationship-between-psychology-and-education/5241/>

Untrained Teacher Without proper training, a teacher would find it difficult to understand the psychology of the child and his problems, what the possibilities are and why the child is not learning. A trained teacher could understand the problem and solve it. .

## **Conclusion**

Psycholinguistics is an interdisciplinary field and important key in the development of the teaching and learning English process. Teachers must know how language learning takes place in people's mind; besides, what factors are influencing positive or negative responses by the part of our students. Psycholinguistics plays a major role in teaching and learning a foreign language. There are some psychological factors that affect teaching and learning, such as motivation and interest, mental health, success ... etc. Also, the psycholinguistics teacher has an impact on teaching and learning. Psychology has changed the spirit of education and given new meaning to learning in the classroom. Psychology changed the old concept of education where only upper class had the ability and right to learn. Pishghadam .2011) claims that ELT as an independent field of study, interact with psycholinguistics and can affect themselves interactively and mutually. It means that ELT can enrich and develop psycholinguistics, and also psycholinguistics can enhance ELT by applying their findings to themselves. The psycholinguistic approach covers many scientific fields such as cognitive psychology, behaviourism, psychology, and linguistics. In addition, in the field of language psycholinguistic considerations have improved the teaching, ways teaching skills in terms of cognitive. Psychology has changed the spirit of education and given new meaning to learning in the classroom. Psychology changed the old concept of education where only upper class had the ability and right to learn. Psychology helps the teacher to understand the learner, learning process and the learning situations. Psychology states that teacher should have sympathetic and affectionate attitude towards the learner. They should have genuine interest in the teaching profession. Psycholinguistics knowledge will help teacher to reduce the intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties. Psycholinguistics helps learners to reduce the intrinsic difficulties.

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