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Socio-cultural acquisition of English language through games to the primary level learners of tribal community in Maruthamalai region

R. Vidhiya

Assistant Professor of English, KPR Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore

*Corresponding author email: vidhyaravichandran47@gmail.com

Mr. R. Rajan

Assistant Professor of English, Government Arts and Science College, Thondamuthur, Coimbatore

Ms. M. I. Ayesha

Assistant Professor of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore

Dr. S. R. Parameshwaran

Assistant Professor of English, Jansons Institute of Technology, Coimbatore

Abstract---Language acquisition is the most successful part in second language learning. Though there are various methods and theories for language learning, most of them does not emphasize on collaborative learning with the society. Primary language (L1) is acquired by the learners with this collaborative method of learning. A child acquires the language by observing the society and interacting with the members of the society day by day. This is not happening in a second language classroom (L2) where learning is happening with a set of rules and formula. Theoretical aspects of the second Language are acquired but practical implication of the rules in their speaking is not acquired. Socio-cultural theory of language acquisition emphasizes the importance of social and collaborative aspects of learning where the cultural and social setup of the language classroom is modified with relevance to the second language that helps in making the language learning naturally. This paper is an experimental study on implementing Socio-cultural theory of language acquisition to the primary learners of tribal community in Maruthamalai region using games that helps in catalysing the Second language acquisition.

Keywords---primary language, secondary language, society, interaction, rules, formulas, acquisition, learning, collaboration.

Introduction

English Language has attained a global significance by occupying almost all fields in the world. It is the medium of instruction and transaction in most of the multinational companies. These multinational companies provide wider career opportunities for the students at tertiary level which help them attain global significance. English being a gateway to enter into such companies and being the people understood the importance of the English most of the learners in the urban area takes interest in learning the language. This exposure is not attained by the tribal learners. The interest they show in the education is very low. They are confined towards their culture and atmosphere and are very reluctant to come out of their society. They care least for educating their children particularly they have created an aversion towards learning English. Making them sit inside the classroom is a greater task and making them learn English is even harder to the teachers of the tribal schools.

The culture of tribal people is very rich and the medicines they prepared using the products available in their area can even cure deadly diseases. But all these treasures lie buried into their culture and are not exposed to the global audience due to the lack of English language. Though there are many researchers who explore tribal culture and translate that to the global audience, they can cover only few areas of the culture as they have limited time to explore. These researchers take maximum time to understand the culture of the tribal and to adopt themselves to that culture. If the research is done by a person in tribal community, he will be having firsthand experience about the culture and medicine that can be projected to the global audience with better clarity. As most of the tribal community have primary schools, they do only primary education which is also done under the pressure of the government.

Even a fifth grade student doesn't know to write his name in English which is the very situation of the learners in every tribal school. Only very minimal amount of people come out of their community for higher education, who also cannot compete with the global audience due to the lack of English language. Taking those as wrong models, the upcoming generation is also creating aversion towards language learning. Their aversion towards English language should be rectified at the primary level. The present paper tries to analyse the capacity of language learning in the tribal schools and tries to implement the socio-cultural theory of language learning among the tribal learners to create interest of learning English language among the primary level learners. This paper is also an experimental study of introducing games associating with the socio-cultural theory of language learning to the primary learners of Maruthamalai region in Coimbatore district. The study is undertaken by using the theory for about 12 learners in the school to create interest in language learning, making them realising the importance of English language in the global scenario and developing their language consciousness to improve their English language.

Challenges in Teaching English Language to tribal learners at primary level

Primary level education is the basement for the future of any student. This should be given properly at their right time. There are various barriers in giving that basement to the primary learners of tribal community. The first challenge is making them realise the importance of education and the English language. They are not updated to the world context, they are closely attached to the nature and they feel complete being with nature. They refuse to accept the change that is given to them. It is very hard for the researcher to make them sit inside the classroom. A good infrastructure and a study environment enhance learning which is lacking in tribal schools. Most of the schools does not have separate classrooms for separate classes, all standard students are made sit in a single classroom and the syllabus is handled evenly for all classes. They lack financial assistance so most of the parents are not ready to send their children to the schools for education instead they are involving their children in their family profession. The major problem is their syllabus; most of the tribal schools use the syllabus that is not framed according to their way of living and their level. Because, the tribal culture is rich and they have wide knowledge about forests and medicines which is needed for the world. The syllabus should be framed to fulfil their needs. The final thing is the schools lack teachers as most of the teachers are reluctant to take risks to stay in tribal set up.

Existing Methods of Teaching

Grammar Translation method is the existing method used in most of the tribal schools where the target language is directly translated into the native language and the content is delivered. This method gives important to the content but when it comes to the language part it fails to improve the language fluency among the learners. The grammar translation method is one of the conventional methods that make reading, a complex task. This prevents the learners' usage of creative and critical thinking that reflects in the life that involves creative and critical judgements.

Teachers' Role in the life of primary learners

The main encouragement for a student is his teacher. A teacher is the torch bearer of the society who creates a good citizen through his teaching. This resource is lacking in many tribal schools. Many well qualified teachers are reluctant to stay in a tribal setup who is accustomed in living in an urban area. The teachers available to the tribal schools also not qualified in the subject of English as it is given least importance in the school sector. Subject expertise of the teacher is not used properly in the school sector. Only one teacher is handling all the subjects which will not give clarity in the learning when it is handled by the teachers of other subjects. The teachers teaching in the class also lack proper knowledge in using the provisions provided for the schools. All these factors reflect in the learners' education.

ICT and Tribal Education

Apart from all these barriers it is very difficult to make the tribal learners sit in a particular place and bring interest in them to acquire language. Most of the innovative methods use digital aids to improve the teaching method in English Language such as PowerPoint presentations, Audio-Visual aids, and smart classrooms. These aids are costly to an extent and are available to the urban learners. Though they are available to the rural and tribal area learners they are not used properly. Either the teacher lack knowledge about it or it is not sufficient for all the learners like it is available to the urban learners. So, Computer Aided Intrusion is not applicable to the tribal learners.

Socio-cultural Theory of Language Acquisition

Socio-cultural theory of language acquisition is initially proposed by Vygotsky (1978, 1986, 1987) later it was developed by the researchers such as Lantolf, Danato, Thorne, Pavienko, Swain and Lapkin. It advocates that language learning including L2 acquisition as a semiotic process where the participation of socially mediated activities is important i.e the learning and cognitive development happen as a result of social interactions. "Human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within social and material environments" (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 201). Family, peers and school are included in such socio-cultural setup so, for the development of higher order of thinking and language acquisition, interactions with these groups are essential.

The opportunity to use language as a means of making sense of experiences with others is a crucial step in learning to use language meaningfully, appropriately and effectively (Park, 2005). The experiences acquired through the interaction with social group is internalized and converted into performance by the child. Imitation of the acts by the adults is the most important process in internalization. This process of imitation is applied in the language learning concept where the learners are provided with the same atmosphere of imitation of language. The learners are given situations to express their emotions and themselves linguistically in the targeted language where their thoughts are expressed linguistically without having language learning in their conscious mind. "Language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity" (Swain, 2000, p. 97). So, more importance should be given to the learner's verbal expression in which the language learning and language acquisition happens simultaneously. This process of language mediating in the process of language learning is called mediation.

The Zone of Proximal Development is another core of Socio-cultural theory that is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It means a child may be able to complete more cognitively demanding tasks if s/he has the right support from an adult or a peer. The assumption is that what a child was once able to achieve with

the help of others, she/ he will be able to achieve on his own in future. If he can learn the language with the help of his peers, soon he can acquire the language on his own.

Activities with the implementation of Socio-cultural theory of Language Acquisition

Entry Test

In order to achieve fluency in the second language, the learners are given intense training by framing ten activities using socio-cultural theory of language acquisition. To frame the activities, entry test was conducted for about an hour through observation of the teacher teaching the class and the students' participation in the class. The researcher when conducting the entry test has analysed that all their instructions for L2 were given in their L1 i.e Tamil and the students were very poor in the target language. The traditional method of teaching prevented their critical thinking and creative thinking. All the vocabulary that is known to them is the result of memorising which they found hard in applying those words in the sentence structure. This clearly shows the result of lack of internalisation. So, the researcher finalised their problematic aspects such as:

- Vocabulary
- Pronunciation
- Sentence Structure
- Expression of Ideas
- Identification of Errors in the sentences

The following are the activities that help in achieving their acquisition process.

Activity 1

Name of the student teacher	: Vidhiya R
Course of study	: Ph. D
Name of the school	: Marudhamalai Tribal School
Subject	: English
Level	: Primary
Skills aimed	: Listening and Speaking skills
Topic	: Ask and Learn
Duration	: 60 minutes
Aids used	: Chalk and Board

General Objective

To develop the students' speaking skills.

Specific objectives

- To enhance the students' peer interaction.
- To improve the students' basic skills of speaking.
- To improve the students' level of thinking as they create questions.

S.NO	PROCESS	TIME TAKEN
1	<p>MOTIVATION</p> <p>Happy morning, kids! Happy to see you all fresh and enthusiastic for today's class. Today it is going to be a session of questions and answers. You can walk around to any friend of yours in the class and ask him/her a question. We will make it interesting.</p>	10 mins
2	<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>This activity is to improve your language skills. First, I will be giving each one a question and you can go around and ask anyone of your choice and get the answer. Once everyone gets a turn, then it is your time to raise any question of your choice.</p>	10 mins
3	<p>ACTIVITY</p> <p>Step 1: The teacher will give one question to each student one after the other Step 2: The student will have to walk around, pick a friend and ask the same question aloud. Step 3: The student can give the answer with the help of the teacher and other friends. Step 4: Now the pair will have to come forward and repeat the question and answer which the whole class has to repeat. The activity will be done until every student gets a chance.</p>	30 mins

Learning experience

Though the students found it difficult in the beginning later they began to gain confidence with the improved peer interaction. As the process is repeated, all the students got the opportunity to speak in front of the class. The questions they ask are the message that are internalised by them and when they ask the questions to the peers, the target language is the mediator to convey the message. The zone where they speak will become the Zone of Proximal Development that helps them in acquiring the fluency in the target language.

Reinforcement and evaluation

The teacher can ask simple questions to the students randomly and make them answer to it. Similarly, the remaining activities were conducted by the student teacher. The names of the activities are given below: The second activity is BALL AND ALPHABET that focused on making the learners familiarize the English alphabets. The researcher made the learners stand in circle and asked them to pass the ball among them. While passing the ball they have tell a letter in the alphabet, a word starting with that letter and a word ending with that letter. As the activity involved their physical activity, the learners actively participated and

as they wanted to tell two words relating the letter of the alphabet within a fraction of second they brainstormed the passive vocabulary in them. As a result they could realise an ample of vocabularies are known to them which are not active in their usage part.

The third activity is ACTION WORDS that focused the basic vocabulary of the primary learners. The researcher performed actions such as jump sneeze, cough, punch, run etc., and the learners have to answer the actions in English. If the learners do not know the words in English, the researcher will be helping them to find out the actions. Though the actions are commonly done every day, its English terms are not known to the learners. This created curiosity among the learners and they keenly observed the English terms of the actions and used it among them.

The fourth activity is STORY FORMATION that concentrated on vocabulary construction and creativity. The researcher gave a theme called 'bus' and the learners have to give the vocabularies related to bus which is noted on the black board. After completion, they have to form the story using the vocabularies on the board. As this is a group activity, the learners enjoyed interaction with peers and forming stories. They were given instruction that they have to interact with their peers only in the target language. Though they initially struggled to interact in the target language, their group participation motivated them to create a zone of proximal development and practiced speaking in groups.

The fifth activity is PAIR AND ENACT that concentrated on the sentence construction. The researcher had deconstructed the groups into pairs and gave a situation to each pair. The pairs should enact the situation in front of the audience. The dialogues framed to the situation are in the target language. Though they were initially hesitant to perform forefront to the audience, they gradually participated and came out of their shyness. Their sentence formation was initially with grammatical errors which the researcher rectified by using the sentences in the class.

The sixth activity NARRATE YOURSELF is focussed on making the learners to give an extempore speech about themselves. They can speak anything about them, their family, their environment, the situations that affected them etc. The only motive is to make them speak in front of the audience. As the theme is about them, they can gather more information and will result in free flow of ideas and thoughts. The major problem that researcher identified is their sentence structure which is a direct translation from the L1. But as they practice it with different topic, there was a gradual development in their language.

The seventh activity is a formal SELF INTRODUCTION where the learners have to introduce themselves professionally. A model self introduction was given to them by the researcher in which ten key areas was given that is to be added in the self introduction. The learners were very curious to present their self introduction professionally as it enhanced their self confidence level.

The eighth activity is REPLICA, where the learners have to imitate their fellow mates in the class. The imitation should focus on the dialogues and

pronunciation of the fellow mates and should be strictly in English language rather than their character. As all the learners are given a chance, they imitated both positive and negative models of their language. It focussed on finding the error in the sentences so it helped them in finding the errors in the language learning the proper usage of the language.

The ninth activity is TEACH AND LEARN where the learners are assigned a task of educating their parents and language learning. As the socio-cultural theory of language acquisition concentrated on social learning, it is important for a learner to have a social set up in his family also. The learners are given a week's time and they will have to teach self introduction to their parents. After a week's time the parents have to present their self introduction. The learners found excited to imagine them as a teacher and teach the language to their parents. This enhanced their self confidence level as they felt superior in language than their parents. In order to teach, the learners took special interest in learning proper self introduction and taught to the parents.

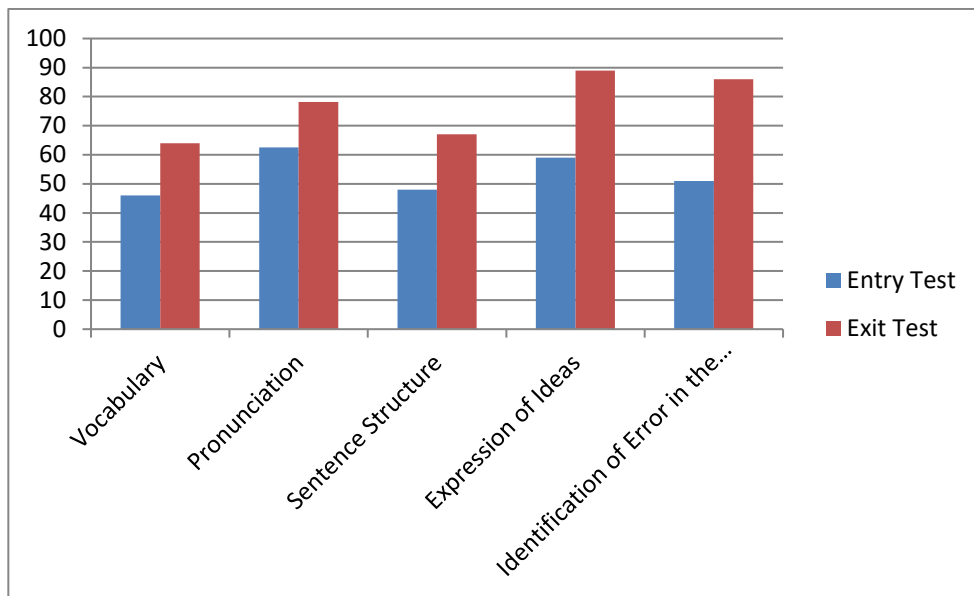
The tenth activity PROJECT YOUR CULTURE is an extempore activity where the learners will have to give a speech about their land, culture, customs, and traditions. They were given two minutes as a preparatory time and two minutes as a delivery time where they have to speak. The students found hard to gather points within the time frame in English and found difficult to find equivalent terms for certain customs and traditions in English. The researcher motivated them by giving the best speaker award which induced competitive spirit in them and enhanced their speech in the activity.

Exit Test

An exit text was conducted to access the improvement of the learners through games and activities. The improvement in the language is very obviously seen. In addition to the observation method, exit test was included with activities that test their language skills. The improvement of their self confidence was very obvious and their aversion towards English language was very much reduced due to the activities. Their creativity has improved to a greater extent as they implemented in their activities. After the activities, the instructions in classrooms by the teachers gradually shifted from L1 to L2. The learners have also created interest in learning the language.

Graph

The following graph is prepared based on the comparison between the percentages of results obtained from the entry test and exit test. It shows five important aspects such as Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Sentence Structure, Expression of Ideas and Identification of Errors in the sentences.



Conclusion

Thus, all these activities are based on the behaviourist principles and relate language teaching to linguistics skills and habit formation. Language is considered as parts and should be mastered separately. The learners' role is to receive and follow the instruction of the teachers which becomes the cognitive process of learning. Planning, setting goals, drafting and generating ideas became part of teaching strategies in L2 classroom. The emphasis on social uses of language is done as interaction is given prominence. The activities started with the creation of interest towards an English classroom and focused mainly on the participation and interaction. This interaction in the target language is the outcome of the internalised social message that is mediated through language. This process of learning the language had a greater impact on the learners

When LSRW skills are given too much importance by the teacher, the learners will be more conscious about their language skills rather than meaning construction. This also will retard the students' ability to develop multiple skills that are required for their academic and life. So, the teaching should concentrate on meaning construction which allows the student to assimilate, internalise and integrate the new information and process the information that they already possess. Through this they understand new information and add personal values to it that eventually end up in acquisition of second language. The language itself gave an alienated feeling to But the most of the parents in the tribal community do not know to read or write in their L1 itself. They were fluent enough in speaking in their L1 only.

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