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## **THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE EXPOSURE AND ARTIFICIAL LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT ON STUDENTS` VOCABULARY ACQUISITION**

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### **Abstract**

*Acquiring wider vocabulary knowledge is an important step for mastering a foreign language and becoming a proficient foreign language speaker. It is commonly assumed that the lack of vocabulary knowledge has a more dramatic effect on clarity and fluency of language than the lack of grammatical knowledge or poor pronunciation.*

*Research conducted by numerous scholars throughout the world has proved that there is an obvious correlation between language exposure and second language acquisition, which also includes vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary acquisition is an important element of second language acquisition which is hardly possible without language exposure. In case of the lack of natural language exposure artificial linguistic environment is one of the options for language learners. There are multiple ways to improve students` vocabulary and facilitate the process of language acquisition using some methods and tools in and outside the language classroom such as creating artificial linguistic environment in the language classroom and by encouraging language learners to use authentic materials for self-study.*

## **Keywords**

Language Exposure, Vocabulary Acquisition, Linguistic Environment, Second Language Acquisition

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## **1. Theories of Second Language Acquisition**

There are several important factors that have some influence on learning a second language and it is essential to isolate the theories behind second language acquisition to figure out how languages are learned and what elements play an important role in a successful language acquisition.

The second language acquisition and input hypothesis developed by Stephen Krashen in the 1970s and 1980s drew everybody's attention to the difference between language acquisition and language learning. The theory was named Second language acquisition, when SLA students acquire a second language. This process is totally subconscious and it occurs when people are focused on communication. It can be opposed to second language learning, which includes formal instruction.

Two other publications that are viewed as integral to the study of SLA are Corder's 1967 essay *The Significance of Learners' Errors*, and (2) Selinker's 1972 article *Interlanguage*. Corder's essay did not comprise the behaviorist component of SLA, while intrinsic internal linguistic processes were given a lot of attention. Selinker believed that second-language learners had the linguistic systems of their own.

### **1.1 Stephen Krashen's Theories of Language Acquisition**

By the 1980s, the theories of Stephen Krashen had become the prominent paradigm in SLA. The difference between acquisition and learning is the most fundamental of all his hypotheses and are widely known among most linguists.

Acquisition is an occurrence that helps us "get the language" subconsciously. In reading texts, watching movies, listening to people or trying to have talks speaking in the target language, we may find ourselves occupied with or exposed to a rich situation that may possibly bring about acquisition of language items just as in the situation of a baby. As they take place in a natural setting, it, for sure, aids "getting a language" better than "learning" (Krashen, 2013)

#### **1.1.1 Krashen's Input Theory**

According to Krashen's Input hypothesis, the learner increases his/her second language proficiency receiving second language 'input' which should preferably be one step beyond his/her

present linguistic development. For example, if a student is at a stage 'i', language acquisition occurs while he/she is being exposed to the input of the level 'i + 1'. Since most language groups tend to be very diverse and the learners cannot be at the same level of linguistic competence, Krashen believes that natural communicative input is the most important factor to designing a syllabus, because that is the best way to make sure that each learner will receive some the input that is appropriate for his/her stage of language proficiency.(Fan Jihua 2010)

### **1.1.3 Krashen`s Affective Filter Hypothesis**

It is also important to mention the Affective Filter hypothesis, which describes Krashen's view on the number of 'affective variables' which play a key role in second language acquisition. These variables include: self-confidence, motivation and anxiety. According to this theory learners with high motivation, a good self-worth and a low level of anxiety will be more to successful in second language acquisition. When a person suffers from low self-esteem, insecurity and inferiority complex, all these can lead to the lack of comprehensible input that in turn will slow down the person`s language acquisition.

### **1.2 Nativist Theory**

Nativist Theory implies that any language acquisition is inborn. This predisposition is a systematic perception of language around us, resulting in the construction of an internalized system of language. Nativists are being fairly rationalistic in their views on language acquisition.

#### **1.2.1 Sociocultural Theories**

In the 1990s a number of new theories appeared in this field of study, such as Michael Long's interaction hypothesis, Merrill Swain's output hypothesis, and Richard Schmidt's noticing hypothesis as well as the introduction of sociocultural theory, an approach which looks at second-language acquisition in terms of the social environment of the learner.

## **2. Vocabulary Acquisition**

Vocabulary knowledge is a benchmark of proficiency in writing, reading, listening and speaking. Since the 1970 with the appearance of SLA theories there has been a dramatic improvement in the field of vocabulary acquisition and reconsidering the role of vocabulary as a whole and the communicative value of vocabulary was finally recognized. Vocabulary acquisition is the largest task that a learner faces. What is more, the recognition of importance of

lexical chunks and its influence on fluency has raised awareness of teachers and learners and made language learning more efficient than ever before.

It has been long established that one of the proven ways to remember a word is to see (or hear) it about 7 times over spaced intervals. Yet even those who possess good memory tend to forget words which happens due to the lack or absence of opportunity to use the target language and its insufficient recycling. Interference of the learner's first language also plays an important role in forgetting, since learners mostly study in monolingual environment with insignificant exposure to their second language.

One of the best options not to forget vocabulary is to reencounter them in original contexts, which brings up the necessity of using extensive reading as a means of increasing exposure to the second language. According to Scott Turnburry (2002) learners need special tasks to organize their mental lexicon, they need to wean themselves on from reliance on direct translation, to be actively involved in the process of getting a feel for their meaning. Therefore, learners need multiple exposures to words and need to express personally relevant meanings. Not all the vocabulary can be taught, learners need plentiful exposure to talk and text.

### **3. Language Exposure and Creating Linguistic Environment in the Classroom**

One of the factors that determines successful language teaching and learning is language exposure, i.e. the amount of time students are exposed to the target language and culture. It also refers to the amount of time a person interacts with language, or when a person takes part in all ways of communication. So, as we can see from the definition, exposure takes place every time a person interacts with the target language. This happens when a language learner is talking to native speakers, teachers, friends, classmates; reading books, magazines, newspapers; browsing the Net; getting information from various media sources, watching youtube videos and movies. In many communities the amount of language and cultural exposure is so limited, that language learners hardly interact with people from other countries, which makes their language teacher the only source of spoken language. So, that makes authentic materials, such as films, magazines, newspapers, literature and the Internet resources the only way of exposure to the target language and culture. With the spread of the Internet and social media second language learners are making greater use of all possible ways and sources to acquire the language.

### **3.1 Teacher as a Source of Input**

It's important to mention that teacher is a highly productive source of vocabulary input. Learners pick up a lot of incidental language from the teacher, especially if the teacher relates stories, interacts with students, asks questions and increases language exposure. Students can also be a good source of vocabulary acquisition, since students pay more attention to what other students say. This allows the vocabulary spin-off in the classroom and creates the friendly stress free atmosphere in the classroom which is integral for successful language acquisition. English teacher sometimes is learners' only input of near authentic language and authentic materials.

### **3.2 The Importance of Exposure for Second Language Students**

For numerous reasons when the students do not have enough exposure to authentic or semi-authentic communication, they can considerably slowdown in their progress and that invariably affects their linguistic development and competence. The lack of native speakers available for students is another reason why students do not have any access to authentic communication. The community where second or foreign language learning is made difficult by some social, political, cultural and other factors can constrain language acquisition. Thus, the classroom can become a place with authentic and efficient language environment can be created. It gives the learners plenty of opportunities to pick up language and encourage them to use a lot of various authentic materials at home and outside classes. One of important factors that determine successful language teaching and learning is the amount of time students are exposed to the target language and culture.

However, for adult language learners artificial language learning environment, created in the classroom has some advantages over the natural environment, where language learners "pick up" the language. (S. Krashen 1984). So, what are the main contributors to increasing language and cultural exposure in the classroom and effective learning of a foreign language and culture? So, a teacher's contribution into his/her students' language acquisition can be creating an acquisition – rich learning environment (S. Krashen 1984) in the classroom, creating so called "English atmosphere" and increasing students' motivation about learning the target language and culture.

## **4. Methodology. Ways to Increase Vocabulary Acquisition**

While some studies prove that adult students can efficiently use informal linguistic environments for second language acquisition if it is available, other studies suggest that the

classroom learning environment is of greater benefit. Both informal and formal environments make a great contribution to different aspects of second language proficiency. The classroom can be used at the same time as a formal and informal linguistic environment which can be more beneficial for SLA students.

#### **4.1 Diversity of Exposure**

The most important thing to start with is to make sure that students' individual work and self-study is arranged in such a way that they have maximum of diverse exposure to the target language with wide variety of materials, authentic and semi-authentic and cultural artefacts.

#### **4.2 Teaching Culture**

Activities which are connected with culture studies can be rather rewarding in trying to improve students' cultural awareness and second language proficiency. By using some a culturally inclusive learning environment we motivate students to work on their intercultural and language skills at the same time as well as helping learners pick up the vocabulary appropriate for various cultural situations and preparing them for cross-cultural communication.

#### **4.3 Using Authentic Materials**

One of the easiest and the most enjoyable ways to increase vocabulary is to use authentic materials which bring the means and aim of learning together and this helps to establish the connection with the outer world.

With the help of those materials we can try to involve learners in authentic cultural experiences. We can use films, videos, television talk shows; different magazines, advertisements and newspapers – anything containing input. Vocabulary acquisition can be made easier because in authentic videos and movies characters use the target language which comes in the natural and extended context, so it leads to easier vocabulary acquisition and cultural awareness.

#### **4.4 Extensive Narrow Reading as a Self-Study Assignment**

Reading provides more opportunities for language learning than spoken discourse. Students acquire some vocabulary incidentally and that happens because of the recurrent vocabulary they already possess. This type of reading means that students chain-read in one genre, thus accumulating some vocabulary in this particular segment. The case for narrow reading is based on the idea that the acquisition of both structure and vocabulary come from many exposures in a comprehensible context, that is, we acquire new structures and words when we understand messages that they encode. (Krashen, 1981). Newspapers and magazines can

present another rich source of graded readers provide a way for students to get comprehensible input. Also, various series of readers are available. Since the number of words is restricted by the level of the reader, it has enough familiar words to encourage students guess the meaning of the unknown ones. Extensive reading should not be regarded as hard work or restricted in order not to demotivate students. All these increases the chances of encounter with the new vocabulary in the context and consolidating it.

#### **4.5 Creating Positive and Friendly Atmosphere in the Classroom**

Positive and friendly atmosphere in the classroom cannot be underestimated. In order to progress in any area the learner needs enough courage to take risks and make mistakes, a willingness to share and engage in the tasks given and ask for help, while the teacher should show interest in the learner's language, culture, thoughts and intentions. Teacher's ability to recognize students' strengths and potential, motivate, stimulate and challenge as well as be sensitive and aware of when to intervene and when to leave alone ensures stress free learning environment for students and increases their motivation. Ironically, despite their purported intention to help, instructors themselves can actually serve as a source of student anxiety. In the day-to-day world of education, some instructors persist with beliefs and behaviors that contradict the findings of the educational research, such as the idea that intimidating students will motivate them to learn the foreign language. (Ocampo, 2017). So, such situations had better be avoided. Besides, the relationship between students' motivation level and proficiency scores are positively paralleled. (Temel, M. & Ozkan, Y. 2016)

#### **4.6 Using Vocabulary Focused Activities, Interactive Tasks and Games**

A lot of vocabulary games that are used in first language can be applied in the second language successfully. The most useful vocabulary games are those that encourage students recall a lot of words at speed and filled with language talk. All kinds of problem solving tasks and debates ensure that learners are engaged in near authentic meaningful interaction.

### **5. Methodology**

This study was conducted in the state university of Saratov, Russia, where English is taught as one of students' second languages. The target respondents that took part in these tests are all IT majors, third year intermediate students (8 male and 5 female). At the beginning of their school year in September 2017 students were given some written vocabulary and grammar tests from the testing booklet of New English file intermediate and a short essay about their

future occupation to assess their overall language proficiency. The second part of the test was a 5-minute-long interview with English teachers. All the tests revealed that students:

1. Were more confident when they had some visual aid (written tests) and quite confused when asked questions.
2. Were not able to answer simple questions on basic topics yet could give precise definitions of some grammar phenomena.
3. Did not understand most of realities (both language and cultural).
4. Coped with an average of 55-88% of grammar tasks and 53-83% of Vocabulary tasks.
5. 5% of students couldn't answer basic questions about themselves, their hobbies, etc. due to confusion, shyness or just inability to understand oral speech.
6. There was a gap between their written and oral performance.

## **6. Results and Discussion**

The research period lasted for 6 months (September-February). All the methods and techniques described above were applied. Apart from their regular English instruction, some changes were made. Throughout this period of time students were watching American TV series at home and in class 2 times a week with further discussion of realities and new vocabulary they encountered with the teacher. They were discouraged from using their native language (Russian) as soon as they entered English classroom. The materials they got for class work and home assignments came from books and authentic press. Every student got an individual task on extensive narrow reading and listening (100 pages a month). Error correction was targeted at paraphrasing, not direct instruction to lower students' anxiety level. Vocabulary and fluency games were practiced for 15-20 minutes during each class. Some attention was given to culture studies and the details of cross-cultural communication. In the end of the spring semester the same tests were given.

**Table 1:** *Students' Progress Chart*

Students	Grammar test (September)	Grammar test (February)	Vocabulary test (September)	Vocabulary test (February)
Student 1	78%	86%	63%	78%
Student 2	73%	81%	57%	74%



Student 3	64%	69%	70%	83%
Student 4	80%	91%	78%	94%
Student 5	82%	89%	80%	95%
Student 6	55%	67%	53%	72%
Student 7	89%	95%	86%	97%
Student 8	68%	74%	65%	81%
Student 9	71%	79%	68%	80%
Student 10	88%	96%	83%	95%
Student 11	72%	78%	69%	81%

As we can see from the table above, the increase in vocabulary (as well as in grammar) shows that learners benefited in both spheres. Vocabulary acquisition was taking place more actively during all the activities that students were engaged during these 6 months. Apart from the results of the written tests, the oral tests revealed that students felt more at ease and less confused answering teacher`s questions about everyday matters and describing pictures. There was an obvious difference in their motivation and during the second oral tests all the students could cope with the tasks given.

Learning any language is a complicated process which includes a lot of factors that should be taken into consideration. Learners of foreign languages and teachers obviously need to take a lot of factors into consideration to turn the tedious learning process into a motivating activity beneficial for both parties.

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