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In association with
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also raises some fundamental questions concerning the relation between derivation and inflection as we have reached the important result that many basic insights can be gained from inspecting this relationship. Words have the forms they have because they function within paradigms. The difference in phonological behavior between verbs and nouns in MA cannot be directly accounted for without a thorough analysis encompassing inflectional paradigms as well. Another insight gained from this analysis has to do the information encoded in the lexicon. To give a rational explanation to the difference between nouns and verbs, we should have access to the categorization frame of the bases; otherwise, the issue of sonority versus alignment will never be understood. One aspiration of standard OT is to treat all data in terms of the conflicting relation between markedness and faithfulness constraints without referring to the lexicon; however, the arguments we have advanced point towards the necessity of having access to lexical information. Finally a universal characterization of the constraint PC, which belongs neither to markedness (in the usual sense) nor to faithfulness should be investigated more in depth as we have seen that its role in shaping lexical items has been pivotal.

Bibliography

The Problems Affecting English Language Learning for Non-Native Speakers: Similarities and Differences from the East and West

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Abstract

In our experience teaching English to Malay and Mexican students and after the revision of bibliographical references related to this topic, we have observed several difficulties in the second language acquisition. We intend to present an overview of the Teaching and Learning of English as an L2 in Malaysia and New Mexico.

In our study we have compared the similarities and differences faced in the processes of teaching and learning English in Malaysia and New Mexico to highlight results in a code-switch of Malay and English (Manglish) and Spanish and English (Spanglish). It will also be highlighted the importance of interest and motivation in second language learning, the connection between the context with the way students learn, the mistakes they make, etc.

1. Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that there are many different reasons for learning a language. In the case under analysis in this article, students learn English as a second language because it is part of the curriculum. This is the reason why, in many cases, they do not see a specific purpose in the learning process.

The background of this article is sociolinguistics and the sociology of language because we consider who speaks, what language, to whom, and when, i.e. our purpose is the study of language in its social context. It is well known that sociolinguistics studies the connections between a society, as a community of speakers, and the language that reflects the socio-cultural organization of that community and is the only appropriate instrument to express its needs. At the
same time, we also enter the field of applied linguistics by applying linguistics to the teaching of English.

Language is a social instrument and the social context can contribute to the study of English as a foreign language. Research into the process of mother tongue acquisition and second language acquisition reveals that there are many similarities, and some differences between the way we learn our first language and the way we learn a second or foreign language.

It is important to know the implications of teaching a second language. As Brown (1987: 168) states:

Second language learning is a creative process of constructing a system in which learners are consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge: limited knowledge of the target language itself, knowledge about the native language, knowledge about the communicative function of language, knowledge about language in general, and knowledge about life, human beings and the universe. The learners, in acting upon their environment, construct what to them is a legitimate system of language in its own right - a structured set of rules which for the time being provide order to the linguistic chaos that confronts them.

Once we have a clear idea of what is implied in learning a second language, it is important to highlight the relevance of second language teaching, i.e., any activity on the part of one person intended to facilitate the learning by another person of a language which is not his or her native one (Altman, 1981: 8).

From the 1960s, second language learners were considered creative and intelligent human beings instead of beings producing imperfect language. What we mean is that second language productions were considered legitimate. There is an important term connected with this and it is called “interlanguage”, introduced by Larry Selinker in 1972, as the independent language system created by L2 learners. It describes, in Brown’s words (1987: 169), “the separateness of a second language learner’s system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages.”

Also important is the difference between “acquisition” and “learning”. Krashen (1985:1) explains this difference in the first of the five hypotheses that integrate his model: He says that there are two independent ways of developing ability in second languages. “Acquisition” is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language; the learner engages in communicative interaction in the L2 where the focus is on meaning and there is no attention to form. “Learning”, on the other hand, is a conscious process that results from the conscious study of the L2 system, focusing on formal grammatical rules and the correction of errors. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1985) proposes that learners acquire morphological features in a natural order as a result of comprehending input addressed to them.

To put it in a nutshell, we can say that the former is a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing a system of language. In Ellis’ words (1994: 14): “the subconscious process of ‘picking up’ a language through exposure”. The latter means a conscious “learning” process in which learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process.

Up to this point, we can say that we agree with Ellis (1994: 15) in that the goal of Second Language Acquisition is the description and explanation of the learner’s linguistic or communicative competence. This is why the researcher must examine aspects of the learner’s usage or use of the L2 in performance, by collecting and analyzing either samples of learner language, reports of learners’ introspections, or records of their intuitions regarding what is correct or appropriate L2 behaviour.

It is a well-known fact that everybody makes errors and mistakes in both the native and second language. Next, let us briefly focus on the distinction between errors and mistakes. Errors are caused by a lack of knowledge about a target language, or by an incorrect hypotheses. They are related to the notion of language competence (competence is knowing what is grammatically correct).

Mistakes are caused by temporary lapses of memory, confusion or slips of the tongue. They relate to performance, i.e., what actually occurs in practice.

We agree with Brown’s (1987: 171) following statement:

Errors- overt manifestations of learners’ systems- arise from several possible general sources: interlingual errors of interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies, and no doubt countless affective variables.

There are many kinds of mistakes (Lewis & Hill, 1985: 93-94), which can be related to stress, intonation, register and appropriacy, or omissions.

In general, there are two possible attitudes to errors: on the one hand, according to behaviourist theory, errors are negative; they create bad habits and
same time, we also enter the field of applied linguistics by applying linguistics to the teaching of English.

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2. English as L2 to Spanish speakers

2.1 The English language in New Mexico

An exchange program between Spain and the United States gave me the opportunity to work as a bilingual teacher at Deming High School, New Mexico (USA) for a year. I taught Bilingual Language Arts to grades 10, 11 and 12. Working as a bilingual teacher allowed me to concentrate on the writing process. I could observe different aspects related to Spanish and English texts, such as the importance of understanding the text as an authentic product, as a way of communication and the importance of paragraph division to organise content, the analysis of theme and theme, and information structure.

My students were following a Bilingual Education Program (Spanish-English). This means that they were Mexicans and their families had decided that they should study in the USA so that they could get a better education. In this situation, students are under constant pressure to learn more than one language for pragmatic, cultural or political reasons. In such situations, languages compete and often controversies generate regarding the relevance or primacy of one language over another. It is evident that individuals can develop positive, negative or mixed attitudes towards one or more languages.

The study reported in this paper examines a corpus of twenty essays written in English by pre-university Mexican students (ten essays were analysed during the first semester and ten during the second semester). Ten students of grade 12 chosen at random were involved in the study; fourteen were female and six were male.

Some of the students (around 30%) had acquired a good level of proficiency in English because there were very few errors in their essays and they showed a good command of the grammar and vocabulary of English. Apart from this, it must be pointed out that some students conditioned this language to highlight their social identity through Spanish. On the other hand, some students made no effort to attain proficiency in English because they saw it as a language of social value, superior to their mother tongue. Finally, we found students interested in acquiring high proficiency in English, but lacking proficiency because of their socio-economic background and environment.

2.2 The Teaching and Learning of English: difficulties faced by Mexican learners

In my experience teaching English to Mexican students and after the revision of bibliographical references related to this topic, I have observed several difficulties in their second language acquisition.

Students wrote about things related to their personal life in the essays; what they did during the weekend, during the holidays, their hobbies and family life, etc. The essays were written at home after I had explained in class the basic steps of the writing process.

The following errors have been found in at least ten of the twenty essays we have analysed, i.e. fifty per cent of students had these problems.

1. Intercultural transfer i.e. interference with the native language because the phonology and grammar of the first language impose on the second language. The result is that we find incorrect grammatical patterns, wrong vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation. It is not surprising that, if students lack grammatical knowledge in their mother tongue, they normally also lack grammatical knowledge of the foreign language.

In the oral and the written language, it is very common to use Spanglish, a phenomenon connected with mother tongue interference. Spanglish, a mixture of Spanish and English, is an evident fact; several writers are publishing in Spanglish. Varo (1971: 109) declares the following on Spanglish:

El fenómeno llamado “Spanglish” presumiblemente se repitió en cada ciclo de inmigración sin inglesa a los Estados Unidos, y así en su momento, debió haber un “italiantong”, un “greekenglish”, etc. Es decir, un italiano o un griego, un alemán, un polaco, etc., inculcados de anglicismos, puros instrumentos, muy precarios sí, pero casi inevitables en el ajuste de generaciones hasta la total absorción lingüística por parte del inglés.
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5. Many times, the main difficulties in written communication are connected with word order and syntax; sometimes students follow the syntactic order of their mother tongue, or they are not familiar with the main syntactic patterns of the English language, i.e. they have to know that English is an SVO language but they also have to be aware of structures such as clitic sentences, existential sentences, etc., in which the order SVO has certain modifications.

6. There is another issue that can be seen as a background to all these problems: the lack of motivation. This can be due to internal or external factors, i.e. issues of culture and society: if students come from a very low income background, they might not see education as something important and purposeful. This goes together with the lack of interest in learning any subject, especially a foreign language: in which we also have to learn questions related to another culture.

Although Mexican students faced many difficulties learning English, I observed students improved their level of written and spoken English from the first to the second semester. Practice and exposure to real materials in English were fundamental for this improvement.

3. English as L2 to Malay speakers

3.1 The English language in Malaysia

The English language in Malaysia plays an important part as the second language for Malaysians since gaining independence from the British in 1957. Today, it plays an even more significant role in the formation of Malaysia as a fast-developing country with facilities and avenues created for the easy acquisition of the language. English is taught initially at the pre-school level, then at primary school, secondary school, and in proficiency classes at university level. It is also included in the national examinations although it is not compulsory to pass. Of late, comments and letters to the editor of English dailies often called for the authorities to halt the deteriorating condition of English in the country, exonerated by students’ results in national examinations. In an effort to address the matter, the Education Ministry introduced the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) to students at pre-university level in December 1999. Achievement of certain bands in MUET, however, is not an entrance requirement for local universities, and even with such a national test, Malaysian students’ acquisition of English remains poor and at best will students acquire more from their family.

12) This is equivalent to the O Level studies in Britain. In Malaysia, the students are in their Sixth Forms of secondary school and at the end of the two years of Sixth Forms will sit for the Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education which must be to apply to local universities and abroad.

13 MUET follows Band 1 – Band 6, which translates into a range with Band 1 meaning ‘extremely limited user’ to Band 6, meaning ‘very good user’.

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Italics appear in the original.

112
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3.2 The Teaching and Learning of English: difficulties faced by Malaysian learners

Comparing my experience and observation of Malay speakers learning English as an L2, with relevant literature review, there are several factors that contribute to Malaysian students facing difficulties acquiring English:

Learners see the language learning as irrelevant. Lim (1994) states that the teaching of English language to Malaysian students is no longer an English for second language learner's situation, but more of English for foreign language learners. Students and teachers either share the same mother tongue, Malay, or are proficient in one common language which makes it difficult for learners to see the relevance of saying "May I go to the restroom?" when they know the teacher understands them if they ask the question in Malay.

Widespread use of Malay in the language of instruction. Entrance to Malaysian public universities does not require a pass in English from their national level high school examination. A majority of first year undergraduates therefore enrol in English proficiency classes within their first three semesters in college. Due to these students' weak proficiency, teachers are bound to resort to using Malay in their English language classes, as teaching the past perfect of the English language using the English language to a student who failed his/her English subject in high school is difficult.

Nonetheless, I concur with Lim (1994) that this practice will not help the students. Still, because the students know the teacher understands Malay, they will ask the teacher questions in Malay. It will therefore depend on the teacher's willpower whether English is used for the explanation.

Interlingual transfer. Similar to the Spanish speakers' experience, a majority of Malay speakers resort to transferring knowledge of their L1 into their production of English. This is evident in both oral and written production of work in class. In her 1994 study, Lim states that peer interaction (in pair/group discussion) is almost entirely done in the mother tongue or shared language. The main cause for this is that the students resort to understanding the English language through their L1 understanding. For example, when a statement or a sentence was written on the board, the teacher could hear students translating the meaning of that sentence into Malay and then they nodded their head to signal understanding.

Intralingual transfer or generalization. Generalisation occurs when certain English words which look like Malay words (and in fact they mean the same thing due to Malay borrowing the English word) are pronounced with the Malay pronunciation. This is perplexing because the spelling of both the English word and the Malay word does have visible differences, yet the English word is still pronounced as the Malay word. For example: organisation (Malay-organisas), population (Malay-populasi), creative (Malay-kreatif), etc. Due perhaps to shyness of delay the lesson in class, students sometimes use the Malay words because they are doubtful of the pronunciation of the English words.

Word order and syntax. Despite learning English since kindergarten and through both primary and high school English lessons, less proficient undergraduates showed a weak grasp of the SVA (subject and verb agreement) and the syntax involved. This resulted in sentences that either did not contain a verb or were ordered based on the mother tongue word order. For example:

I very good student.
I have house big.

Vocabulary and spelling problems. Students with weak English reading skills were unable to increase their repertoire of English vocabulary as a result this further lowered their ability to spell English words correctly because they did not see the words often. Therefore, students immediately substituted the English word with its Malay equivalent when they were required to speak or write. Also, students spelled words as they thought they sounded. For example betul for 'beautiful'; silen for 'silence'; gentlemear for 'gentleman'; label for 'cable'; goveren for 'government'; and tabel for 'table'.

Despite the difficulties highlighted above, as an ELT practitioner in Malaysia, I feel all is not lost. In fact, the strong emphasis given by the Malaysian government to the teaching and learning of English has provided support and motivation to teachers and continues to do so for ELT practitioners at all levels of education.
However, realizing “the edge” that a good acquisition of the English language provides, the Malaysian government has placed more emphasis on better learning and teaching of English. Since January 2003, Mathematics and Science subjects are taught in English for students in Year 1 Primary schools (6-year-olds), Form 1 High school (13-year-olds), and Lower 6 High school (18-year-olds). There are relevant studies being carried out by academics and the Education Ministry to view the results of such bold program. One example is the latest study done by the State Education Department in Sabah, which drew four conclusions from an analysis of the results of a sample study on the teaching of English, and the teaching and learning of Science and Maths subjects in English. In the study, it was found that primary school students fared better than high schools students in the three subjects.

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4. Conclusions

Compared to the Mexican students in this study, the Malaysian students did not attempt to use English in their conversation so that it would result in a codeswitch of Malay and English (Manglish). This is surprisingly because Manglish exists in the Malaysian yuppie community. The Malaysian students rarely, if ever (especially in the rural schools), resort to codeswitching between Malay and English. This is, however, understandable because they do not have enough proficiency in English to do so. The most that would be tried by the Malaysian students in English lessons would be what is termed 'broken English'. In this sense, the Mexican students fared better because the ability to codeswitch entails at least some knowledge of both languages even if unstable (Duran, 1994).

Second language learning necessitates interest and motivation, and in both the cases of this study (the Mexican and Malaysian students), they lack the motivation and persistence to learn the L2. Husin et al. (2001) concluded in their study that a persistent problem faced by many English teachers, especially the non-specialists, is the attempt to sustain genuine interest in students continuing to learn English to use English once the examinations are over. In Malaysia matters often tend to be more difficult when the school concerned has teachers who are non-specialists, i.e. teachers who did not specialise in English as a Second Language teaching diploma/degree programs but who, due to the unavailability of an English language teacher, have been instructed or requested to teach the subject.

This problem of non-specialist teachers or sometimes termed 'non-optionists' has been around since the early 90s. Abdul Hamid (1993) commented that language teacher development must also be looked into in the context of deterioration of English in Malaysia. Language teachers need to be competent pedagogically and at the same time confident in their ability to teach the language, or students will feel the effect. In this sense, we have to highlight that bilingual teachers in New Mexico had the opportunity of attending courses, seminars and workshops on methodology, discipline and how to apply new technologies in the classroom.

Malaysia in general is bilingual—most road and street signs, billboards, shops and restaurants use written in both Malay and English, especially in the cities. The local radio and television have channels broadcasting 24 hours in English, and most recently, the Malaysian government gave instructions for universities to use English as the medium of instruction (the pilot project begins with private universities and colleges) before 2010. With all the emphasis, exposure as well as the availability to use English, it is still perplexing to note that the English of some Malaysian students fails to improve. Needless to say, although in a State like New Mexico the influence of Spanish is evident (we cannot forget that this State was part of Mexico in the past), students are exposed to English all the time in the streets and in shops. The other side of the coin is that most of them speak Spanish at home, which can explain the failure to improve spoken English.

In our view, errors are something positive in the learning process, i.e. we agree with the cognitivism or mentalism model since we consider that errors are an integral part in the learning process.

Transfer and overgeneralisation are aspects of the same underlying learning strategy. In both cases, the learner uses something that he/she already knows about language: the learner uses his/her previous knowledge of the second language in the case of overgeneralisation and, in the case of transfer, what is used is the mother tongue because this is a good way to organise the second language knowledge.

A second language teacher is a very important person in the life of students. Needless to say, a teacher is always a powerful person since he/she has the power to affect people's lives. The process of teaching and the method used by the teacher are relevant to the way students perceive the second language. Depending on the knowledge the teacher has on the second language and the culture surrounding the L2, students might become more interested in the culture surrounding the second language and might be more interested in learning English.

It is important to correct students because that is part of the learning process, but if communication takes place even with errors and mistakes, we should not discourage students from their work, whether oral or written. Teachers should show students what to do instead of what not to do, which implies the use of positive comments instead of just marking errors. Teachers and students have to remember that we learn from errors.

We should keep in mind that learners vary according to the situational context, i.e., the context is constantly connected with the way students learn and the mistakes they make.

When we face errors, we should always see them as something inevitable in the learning process. Errors are part of life and, if we perceive them in this way, we see our students as human beings willing to progress and improve not only in English but in any aspect of their lives. Errors provide students with the opportunity to self-correct and the teacher's corrections give...
4. Conclusions

Compared to the Mexican students in this study, the Malaysian students did not attempt to use English in their conversation so that it would result in a code-switch of Malay and English (English). This is surprisingly because English exists in the Malaysian yuppies community. The Malaysian students rarely, if ever (especially in the rural schools), resort to code-switching between Malay and English. This is, however, understandable because they do not have enough proficiency in English to do so. The most that would be tried by the Malaysian students in English lessons would be what is termed 'broken English'. In this sense, the Mexican students fared better because the ability to code-switch entails at least some knowledge of both languages even if unstable (Duran, 1994).

Second language learning necessitates interest and motivation, and in both the cases of this study (the Mexican and Malaysian students), they lack the motivation and persistence to learn the L2. Husin et al. (2001) concluded in their study that a persistent problem faced by many English teachers, especially the non-specialists, is the attempt to sustain genuine interest in students continuing to learn English to use English once the examinations are over. In Malaysia matters often tend to be more difficult when the school concerned has teachers who are non-specialists, i.e. teachers who do not specialise in English as a Second Language teaching diploma/degree programs but who, due to the unavailability of an English language teacher, have been instructed or requested to teach the subject.

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students feedback about certain aspects that need revision. In this way, the
teacher finds out more about language acquisition and the learning process.

If students see learning English connected with intercultural
communication and opportunities to work, travel, know other cultures, etc.,
they might increase their motivation to learn. As teachers, we have to emphasise
that language is a tool and it is necessary to learn to use it.

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Teaching and Language Corpora: The Debate

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Abstract

The first signs of interest from the language teaching community about
corpus work were displayed when firm evidence from corpora demonstrated that intuition was not the most reliable way
to understand the nature and structure of language. Data from corpora, rather than from introspection, demonstrated the
centrality of lexis and phrasal meaning in communication, hence suggesting that more attention be given to them in teaching than
had traditionally been the case. While linguists and teacher-practitioners have extolled the valuable contribution of corpora to
teaching and learning, many in the linguistic and teaching community have also viewed this contribution with much
reservation and concern. This article seeks to discuss the main controversial issues surrounding the use of corpora in language
teaching and learning. These issues centre on the following aspects: corpora as open-ended supply of data, language
prescription, the corpus-driven approach, lexical frequency, target
norms, and diverse teaching and learning traditions.

Introduction

The first signs of interest from the language teaching community about
corpus work were displayed when firm evidence from corpora demonstrated that intuition was not the most reliable way to understand the nature and structure of language. More attention has been given to the use of corpora in the classroom especially since data from corpora demonstrated the centrality of lexis and phrasal meaning in communication. This attention has been
acknowledged in the contributions corpora have made in the language
classroom in the following aspects: a) as open-ended supply of language data, b) promoting discovery-based learning, and c) providing customised language tasks for learners.

While the value of corpora is widely recognised by the community of linguists
and teaching practitioners, the contribution is not as widely accepted by all.