CHAPTER - II

MEDIA IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION 
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CHAPTER II

MEDIA IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Languages are acquired, not learned, therefore they cannot be taught. Nevertheless, how to facilitate language acquisition in the classroom has been the main concern of the language teachers. They are in an unenviable position to ensure that the formal language classroom is the apt place for language acquisition. How can they do it?

Insights into the various forms of acquisition and modes of learning might offer us solutions, or at least answers, so that we can identify and recognize workable language learning methodologies which in turn promote language acquisition. We begin with a review of what is known about the acquisition and learning of languages and the role of media in this process.

FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The ease with which children acquire their vernacular is due to the concept that acquisition of a language is a natural cognitive activity. Chomsky hypothesizes that every individual has innate potential which enables him to acquire his first language (L1). Chomsky's Theory of Universal Grammar states that the child begins to compare the grammar he acquires with his innate knowledge of possible grammars. Thus the "universal grammar present in the child's mind grows into the adult's knowledge of the language so long as certain environmental triggers are provided...." (Chomsky 1980: 33, cited in Cook, 1985). Therefore, language acquisition is "the growth of mental organ of language triggered by certain experiences" (Godwin 1976 in Cook, op.cit.).

The richness of the linguistic environment is one of the most striking features of the context in which the young child acquires his L1. He is exposed to a wide range of unsimplified version of the standard language which he hears adults using among
themselves. This adult language may not be initially comprehensible to the child, but, because he is constantly and continuously exposed to it, he learns, in course of time, to discern patterns and decipher codes which become comprehensible through hypothesizing.

More often than not, adults use simpler codes with the child. So he is exposed to different varieties of the same language. Simplified language - the variety adults use when talking to the child - has been argued to be different from the variety that they use among themselves (Snow, 1972, cited in Newport et al. 1977: 112). For instance, a mother talking to her young child automatically modifies her speech so that he might understand her utterances. This motherese, the peculiarities of which are a high-pitched voice, well-found speech, short and simple sentences and a typical syntactic and psycholinguistic structure for sentences with a large proportion of imperatives and declaratives, a low degree of embedding and a high degree of intelligibility, frequency of self-repetition and deixis, is not consciously and deliberately pre-planned.

On the other hand, language in normal use, as Chomsky observed (1965: 31 quoted in Hymes, 1971: 271), comprises "false starts, deviation from rules, changes in plans in mid-course and so on." In other words, the variety of language that surrounds the child is complex, elliptical and "fairly degenerate in quality" (Chomsky, op. cit.). Despite these oddities and complexities, the child grows into a proficient language user. For, he "develops rules for the use of different forms in different situations, and an awareness of different acts of speech..... the acquisition of competence for use indeed can be stated in same terms as acquisition of competence for grammar" (Hymes, 1971: 279). A normal child begins to acquire in such an environment knowledge of sentences, grammatical and appropriate. "He acquires competence as to when to speak, when not to, as to what to talk about, with whom, where, in what manner."(Hymes, op. cit.).

Though children are not exposed to the same primary linguistic data nor to the same amount of such data, almost all of them crack the codes of the linguistic system. They learn to comprehend and produce various kinds of sentences, use them in all kinds of situations and express varied thoughts. The language of each child is "coloured with the social value and conventions of the society which uses it."(Brumfit, 1980).
Li acquisition occurs within the context of physical and cognitive development. The child passes through a series of interim grammars which are simple to complex in nature. This process is simply the learning of language by using it. The child's needs urge him to comprehend his linguistic experience and express himself in such situations.

Yet, imitation plays a crucial role in language acquisition. According to Brown and Bellugi (1964: 133 - 151), imitation is bi-directional. First, the child's telegraphic utterances are expanded when they are repeated by adult listeners. For example, "Buy toy" becomes "Buy me that toy." Secondly, when the child attempts to imitate the adult invariably shortens the sentence to two or three words. For example, "You haven't drunk the milk yet" is reduced to "Going to drink." It has not been established that such telegraphic expansion or reduction is essential for the development of language acquisition, as Brown and Bellugi (op.cit.) point out "all we know is that some parents do expand and their children do learn."

As stated earlier, language competence is acquired from the communicated settings in which the child grows. A child in the process of acquiring his Li is given a lot of encouragement, "his phonological innovations are welcomed and his bits of words are made much of." (Macnamara, 1973). His utterances are further reinforced when adults accept and respond to his telegraphese. His errors are seldom corrected, for the focus is on the meaning and not on the structure of his utterances. Finally, the child through his methods of trial and error succeeds in acquiring the target language.

The child's need to be understood and to become a member of his community motivates him to shape his language to meet the socio-cultural requirements. "His need and desire to be an accepted member of his peer group, to be treated as an equal and to join in their games is an even greater motivational factor. The reward for success and the punishment for failure is enormous." (Macnamara op.cit.). These factors lead them to language competence and allow him to become a proficient user of his L1.
"Throughout his history, man has learned to use languages other than his native tongue to communicate with members of other language groups and other cultures." (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). They further observe: "it is almost a paradox that what man seems perfectly equipped to do when the need and opportunity arise... acquire the ability to communicate in another language... seems so elusive to language classes and instructors."

Most efforts to bring about effective language acquisition in a formal classroom environment have failed. This is arguably because the methodologies employed have overlooked that vital lead to language acquisition: the provision of language-rich environment. The formal classroom situation lacks in such an environment from which the learner can selectively acquire inputs, according to need and ability.

Earlier language teaching theories were based on the notion that a language can be learnt through the mode of habit-formation, therefore, practice and reinforcement were considered to lead to language. Controlled inputs, wherein the learner was presented with the "right size doses" of a second language ($L_2$), were practiced till over-learning occurred, that is, automatization of the structure being practised (Ellis, 1986). Language learning, therefore, like all learning, was built upon the chains of stimulus-response bonds and controlled through reinforcements. There was no room for active processing of the second language by the learner.

Language learning, according to behavioural theories, implied the ability of the learner to learn and produce grammatically correct forms and structures. However, this "Notion that language can be acquired through carefully prepared bits and pieces of formal grammar and structure has produced structurally competent student - the one who has developed the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences - but who is unable to perform a simple communicative task." (Newmark, 1966). An L$_1$ learner often constructs sentences which will convey his message, but which are not always grammatically correct. If the native acquirer's attention were at all times focussed on form, his attempts at communication would be defeated and perhaps he would not venture to communicate at all.
The Behaviourists also claimed that language learning was not an internal but an external phenomenon, made manifest by behaviour. Speech therefore was an indication that language was learned, linguistic competence being evident through speech. But speech is not primary, nor does it lead to language acquisition (cf. Krashen, 1985). Imperfectly produced language was frowned upon then whereas evidence shows that even the native acquirer utilizes ad hoc forms of language production. In the classroom, the language teacher feels duty bound to correct every mistake that the L2 learner makes in his attempt to communicate. This focus on form not only makes the learner conscious of his mistakes but also acts as an impediment to language acquisition. For, "if a mother corrected her child every time he used constructions such as 'doed', 'goed', 'the daddy goed' and 'I doed', she would direct his attention to the output of language, the retrieval of grammatically correct forms and perhaps restrict the development of additive grammatical structures." (Winitz and Reeds, 1975: 13).

The language classroom does not permit the learner to test his hypothesis of how the second language works. Unlike his native counterpart, the L2 learner is unable to make use of his limited linguistic resources; he has to make do with whatever words he has to use in a specific situation. Thus any effort at meaningful production is foiled.

Further, the simplified forms of motherese or caretaker language are missing in the formal classroom. Careful gradation and discrete presentation of structures make the formal variety of classroom language deficient, for it lacks all the features needed for language comprehension. There are neither the extralinguistic and non-linguistic cues nor the situational and contextual implications which are usually associated in the acquisition process of L1. Words, phrases and sentences 'in isolation become meaningless in the L2 classroom.

Every language is culture specific. Unless the learner is provided with the background information, the L2 proves to be ambiguous to him. Literal translation of word meaning cannot provide the semantic aspects which are essentially required to resolve this ambiguity and often there are no word substitutes in the mother tongue.
Classroom language learning can only be beneficial to the learner if the teacher realizes that it is not a content subject to be taught but a skill-oriented medium of communication, and that as a facilitator, he has to provide the learner with the means to communicate his thoughts to others. Besides this, the major factors in the formal language classroom are interaction, motivation and interest which would lead the learner to language acquisition.

**LANGUAGE ACQUISITION Vs. LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The first language acquisition, as we have seen, is a subconscious process wherein the language acquirer is not always aware that he is acquiring a language. Language acquisition implies language competence and language proficiency. It is the ability to use a language fluently and meaningfully. It is also the ability to communicate easily without the conscious application of grammatical rules. A proficient language user, like the native speaker, tacitly knows the underlying rules which he may not be able to define explicitly.

The L1 acquisition takes place, as we have seen, in a language-rich environment which offers the acquirer the necessary inputs for language development. According to Krashen (1985), all language acquisition, whether L1 or L2, occurs under a set of similar conditions.

Krashen's *Input Hypothesis* states that all language is acquired in just one way - by understanding messages, or by obtaining sufficient comprehensible input. An L2 can also be acquired if comprehensible input, the essential ingredient for language acquisition, is made available in sufficient quantities. Comprehensible input is central to all language acquiring situations. When the acquirer is provided enough comprehensible input and a low anxiety situation, the mental organ - the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) - will function automatically. The acquirer cannot help but acquire the language, he does not choose to acquire "under normal conditions, any more than he chooses (or can fail) to organize visual space in a certain way - or for that matter, any more than certain cells in the embryo choose (or can fail) to become an arm or the visual centre of the brain under appropriate environmental conditions." (Chomsky, 1975: 71, cited in Krashen 1985: 4).
Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process that results in 'knowing about language.' The grammatical rules and structure of a language are consciously learned and not acquired. Learning allows us to form discrete grammatical rules that we have learned. It is learning that is affected when we are much conscious of our errors, and when we apply the grammatical rules to correct our output. Learning occurs in the formal language classes where language is taught through drills and structures; where learners are not encouraged to communicate spontaneously. In this sense, second language classroom is more a place of learning than that of acquisition. Spontaneous language production however, occurs because of acquisition and not because of learning.

Krashen (1985) claims that language acquisition can only occur in one way, when the language acquirer understands messages. Language input may exist all around us but unless it is comprehensible to the language acquirer, it is meaningless and therefore cannot be acquired.

To acquire a new language we need input at a level just a little beyond our current level of competence. As Krashen explains it, if our level is \( i + 1 \), we can attain this level provided we understand language containing \( i + 1 \).

If input is in sufficient quality and is understood, it provides the necessary rules automatically. Thus an acquirer gains all the appropriate rules and structures, that is language competence when he acquires language. There is no need for deliberate grammar teaching. What is essential is comprehensible input.

**COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA**

Comprehensible input can only be effectively acquired when the acquirer is in a position to mentally accept that input. Krashen's language acquisition theory claims that the native speaker acquires his mother-tongue because of

(i) comprehensible input and

(ii) low affective fitter.

The 'affective fitter' is a mental block which does not allow acquirers to fully utilize the comprehensible input that they receive. It acts as a block, and this block
may be due to the acquirer's anxieties, lack of self-confidence and self-consciousness.

To ensure that the effective filter is down, the linguistic environment must ensure that the learner is not defensive, is motivated and self-confident. By providing interesting material through which the acquirer obtains the message easily and presenting it with the help of AV aids, one can enable the acquirer to acquire the language, whether L₁ or L₂ proficiently.

Effective teaching methods that follow the principle of comprehensible input can effectively change an ordinary, uninspiring language classroom to a language rich environment. Thus any language class can provide a great deal of comprehensible input in a manner that is of interest to the students. The first ingredient, (along with comprehensible input) that is required, is a relaxed atmosphere to motivate the acquirer. The focus of the acquirers should be on the message, not on the language; the students must be encouraged to participate in interesting and enjoyable activities.

Authentic materials help the students understand language of the outside world, which is the goal of the language class. Reading for pleasure is powerful source of comprehensible input, and so are audio-visual media. The language lab, for example can effectively be employed to supply comprehensible input through stories, songs, plays and interesting discussions. The visual media are very valuable aids in providing the necessary context to aid linguistic comprehension and improve background knowledge.

Classroom methodologies which ensure that the student's focus is on the message and not on the language - are all effective methods for language acquisition: examples, Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR) (1982), Lozanov's Suggestopedia (cf. Bancroft 1978) and Terrell's Natural Approach (1983). Such methods are effective for initial and general language acquisition. In addition, Krashen suggests that other effective methods of acquiring language are the Immersion Method and sheltered classes, wherein the students learn languages via output learning, as on Navodaya schools where one or two subjects such as science and mathematics are taught in English. Also, as a number of the co-curricular activities such as debates, dramas and even the morning assembly are conducted in English.
Since in such (sheltered classes) learners are all L2 learners, the teacher must provide sufficient comprehensible input to ensure that the learner understands the subject being taught. The interaction thus is between the teacher and the students. Such 'bridge classes' are, according to Krashen (1989: 57 - 67) excellent for the transition from the general language class to main stream language acquisition. It must be noted that such classes and interaction classes are functioning effectively in Canada where majority English speakers learn through the minority language French and vice versa.

According to Krashen (op. cit. 1989: 93 - 109), it is not the materials that matter but whether or not comprehensible input is provided. Therefore, even currently used materials can be effectively employed for language acquisition, if the teacher ensures that they are comprehensible. Thus, by providing background information and context (as mentioned earlier), by using a simplified code which contains all the features of motherese, caretaker or foreigner language; the teacher can make the formal language classroom a comprehensibly language-rich environment.

Another feature of language acquisition is what Krashen (1989), following Prof. Barber's description, calls the 'din in the head' (Barber 1980: 29 - 30). This phenomenon occurs in intermediate language acquirers who are surrounded by the language they are acquiring. Thus such acquirers can find that words, phrases, intonations etc. of the language keep up an intense rhythmic hum in the mind - that is the acquirer discovers that without his bidding these words etc. keep making presence felt mentally. According to Krashen, "The Din is a result of stimulation of the language acquisition Device" (Krashen 1989: 39). This can be compared to the phenomenon wherein the words of a song or poem continue to hum unbidden in the mind, though you are only semiconscious of its presence, you continue to hum it all the time.

According to Krashen, the 'Din' is set off by comprehensible input which contains significant quantities of the acquirer's 'i + 1' structure that the student has not yet acquired but is ready for. The 'Din' is only effective in the case of intermediate language students, for, is advanced students, there is little left for the acquirers to learn. In the case of a beginner, it proves to be only noise.
A rich linguistic environment can provide sufficient inputs to start such a 'Din' in acquirers' minds thereby facilitating language acquisition. This can be effectively brought about through audio-visual materials wherein the language acquirer can be beneficially 'submerged' in interesting and motivating comprehensible language.

MEDIA AS INPUT

According to Krashen's input hypothesis, language can only be acquired through understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input. Thus we are able to understand language with the help of context, which as stated earlier, includes extra linguistic information, our knowledge of the world and primarily acquired language. A person therefore acquires language through his perception of the elements from the linguistic environment surrounding him (in the case of native language acquirer) or what is provided (in the case of an L2 acquirer) in the form of comprehensible input by the language teacher, caretaker or foreigner. What the language acquirer needs, to know the language, is to understand messages.

How can the teacher as a facilitator provide the necessary comprehensible input in a language deficient class environment? How can we ensure comprehensibility so that the acquirer can infer meanings for linguistic messages in the L2? According to Krashen (1981, 1989), one of the means of providing enough comprehensible input for language acquisition in the classroom is the use of the issued element as well as other realia.

The use of AV aids can be effectively exploited in the classroom to provide comprehensible input through contextual information. Such aids provide the student a deeper, near-life experience of the language being acquired, for they provide the listener, viewer chunks of authentic language within a whole context.

Contextual information is the shared knowledge between participants of a given conversation. This knowledge which may not be explicitly stated is assumed or implied by conversation partners. For example, a grammatically complete sentence such as 'Oh, it's cold!' is meaningless in itself whereas in a given context it could imply the weather, the soup or even the water one is bathing in - thereby according meaning. The visual element, thus, by providing the context, eliminates the ambiguity that might exist in (isolated) aural or written inputs alone.
Though paralinguistic and non-linguistic elements are used in real life to supplement (and to duplicate) the linguistic message, for the language acquired they act as an effective comprehension uses to access the meaning of a message. The visual element therefore enables the viewer to experience the authentic language, aiding comprehension and retention by contextualising language. Not only is the viewer able to see the speaker and the setting, but he can conceptualize deitic factors as well. For example, when a speaker asks 'Where shall I put these?' or 'What do you want me to do with these?' the utterance itself can be rather vague without the visual element to classify what 'these' stands for.

The visual element in itself can provide communicative meaning to a situation wherein two people can communicate with each other through eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. But generally, the visual and aural elements supplement each other, as in real life situations. As Holec (1975: 30, quoted in Willis J) points out, "It is not just the visual element but the net work of interactions between the verbal and non-verbal components that leads to full comprehension." In the classroom, however, the visual element may initially be used to duplicate the aural channel example to classify the meaning of a new language item. This parallel coding of the same message however differs from the integrated and cumulative function of non-verbal features in face to face interactions. Here, they convert to contribute to a final meaning or message of which they are intrinsic part. This duplication makes the linguistic element more meaningful and the message clear to the learner.

Visual cues can be effectively employed to predict what is to come. Communicative competence implies the ability to predict what one's interlocutor might be about to say. Production is restricted to situations and contexts aided by background knowledge. Contextual information can only be meaningful to the person who has previous knowledge (that is background knowledge) pertaining to the context. The visual, near authentic environment, can help build up knowledge through the situations and contexts depicted.

The video combines all the AV elements of film, TV and radio. Since it can be controlled by the user, it looses some of the ephemeral qualities of film and TV. There are no time constraints to adhere to and one can store programmes which can be sown according to the viewers' convenience. Such programmes, taped from
domestic broadcasts, provide all the benefits that other realia such as newspapers, magazine, pictures and records do. Effective deployment through the teacher's control can ensure comprehensibility, for the teacher can interrupt and replay sequences: the action can be frozen and the visual or aural component can be removed. This allows active participation and interaction on the students' part. They can be motivated to

(a) interpret verbal cues,
(b) supply the verbal elements,
(c) predict through context (that is infer through a top-down approach)  

(Lonergan 1984)

Authentic video programmes can immerse the language student into the social and cultural life of the native speaker. The language used is the "real language" that is the colloquial language used by the native speaker in his day-to-day affairs. The language of the programmes is determined by his audience: there programmes are produced for entertainment, therefore they cater to a vast, heterogeneous audience. So the language must be easy to comprehend; it must public enjoyment and comprehension. This language employs may of the communicative and linguistic techniques found in motherese such as deixis and repetitiveness (a natural kind of repetition found in real life). Moreover, his reference must be to occurrences that the viewers are immediately aware of that is it has the quality of immediacy, the language of the "here and now."

Use of Audio-video Media in Second Language Acquisition

Of late, language acquisition is increasingly viewed as a practical skill that leads to communicate with native speakers at a variety of different levels. Multinational companies have come into existence and trade across language frontiers has increased dramatically. Travel has become easier and borders are crossed with relative ease. Higher studies and employment in foreign countries have also increased very much. Books, journals and newspapers, radio, film and television programmes are read, heard or seen as a matter of course across national boundaries.

"So, the times have never been more propitious," according to Brian Hill, "for advocates of language teaching and yet this happy situation brings with it a difficult and
unique set of problems.” The foremost of the problems is the difficulty to deliver communicative goods. Novel approaches have to be invented making use of new materials through modern equipment. It is true that any communicative design sans a judicious application of educational technology is an exercise in futility.

The inevitable point in a media-based instruction is that the media player, i.e. the radio-set, the television box, the video cassette recorder or, for that matter, the computer, cannot and does not replace the teacher. In effect, audio or video modifies the teacher’s role so as to make him/her more of a facilitator, adapting media source material to the needs of individual or groups of students. In this context, the uses of video are listed as follows:

1. AV Media help the teacher in providing the necessary stimulus for motivating and introducing effective learning experience. A single teacher cannot provide such a variety of situations, voices, accents, themes and presentation techniques as an audio or video programme can.

2. Authentic language is now the start-all and end-all of a second language classroom. There is no better medium than audio or video for providing students with the linguistic material needed by them in order to acquire proficiency in a second language.

3. The content of the language material can be presented in real situations through audio and video programmes.

4. A wide range of paralinguistic clues such as gestures and visual references can help in basic comprehension and accurate understanding. Video programmes ensure this aspect whereas books, audio tapes and computer programmes cannot provide this.

5. Topicality is guaranteed to a larger extent by a massive bank of radio and TV material compared to moribund course material found in textbooks and artificial learning material in audio-tapes and computer programmes.

6. Relevance is a key ingredient of video and this makes the language acquiring experience meaningful by weaving the language into an identifiable cultural and social fabric. The visual character of a country - its architecture, its customs, its dress, its climate, its flora and fauna - can be effectively conveyed via video programmes.
7. Adaptability is yet another advantage of audio and video. The same programme can be used to advantage with beginners, intermediate or advanced learners for developing various language skills.

8. Audio and video programmes can help the language teachers to improve their linguistic skills and keep them up to date.

CONCLUSION

Audio-video programmes can be effective as classroom materials since they have all the elements necessary to make input comprehensible. It is for the language teacher to exploit such materials in a manner that will encourage a student to utilize his linguistic knowledge and his background knowledge to further better his linguistic competence.