



Principles of Language Learning

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1. Introduction

Language learning is related to the formation of a set of habits. In the case of learning one's mother tongue, though these principles are involved, a learner acquires the language, being unaware of it and without any conscious effort. But when a language is being acquired in a formal set up, as a second language, it becomes necessary for a language teacher to apply all these principles for the teaching and learning of a language. **Sharma and Tuteja (2001)** gave the principles of language learning which are as under:

2. Principle of Speech

When a second language is taught in a school situation, it is common that the teacher follows LSRW skills. She follows oral approach in the beginning to teach the audio-lingual skills first followed by reading and writing. Language as we all know is vocal-auditory channel. This principle very clearly explains that without the primary knowledge of language patterns, speech is incomplete, imperfect and inefficient to decipher the written material. If the students master the language orally, they will be ready to read and write as a follow up activity. Students who first learn to write or understand the script cannot as a rule learn to speak by themselves. Teacher can use suitable models of speaking like tapes or disc recordings so that the students learn the language by imitation.

3. Principle of Basic Sentences

These are practical principles advocated by almost all linguists based on psychological justification. Students can easily imitate or repeat longer utterances or sentences easily in their mother tongue rather than in a foreign language. The memory span of the child will be short and there is every chance that he forgets what he listens to, when he is learning a second language. The student cannot use the examples to understand the grammar or create other sentences by analogy because he does not remember them. To help him overcome this difficulty, he can start using and memorizing simple conversational sentences.

4. Principle of Patterns as Habits

The primary aim of learning language is using it in day-to-day life. For writing, one can use sentences and they are constructed with the help of patterns. To know the language is to use its patterns of construction with appropriate vocabulary at normal speed for communication. Verbalizing or understanding a pattern is of little use until the student forms the habit to practice patterns. Practice will assist the student to learn and use the language through variation as related to the situation.

5. Principle of Sound System

Language is spoken in form and is verbal in nature. Language should be taught to the students with the help of sound system. These sounds can be taught to the students through various methods like demonstration, imitation, props, contrast and practice. The sound system has to be taught with the use of structures and vocabulary. But the child cannot learn through mere observation. Partial attempts, drops in the form of articulator clues and minimal contrasts eventually focus the phonemic differences and the child will learn to grasp the intricacies of sound. The introduction to sound system and enough

practice will lead the child to get first hand experience. This helps him speak fluently. This practice leads to the development of other skills.

6. Principle of Vocabulary Control

When a child begins to learn any language, one first learns to master the sound system and then grammatical patterns. To help one construct correct sentences, vocabulary should be taught. But this should be minimal, selected and graded properly. If too many words are thrust on the minds of the students, they cannot probably learn quickly. So, if the load of vocabulary is minimum at first, they can easily learn basic patterns and significant sounds. Vocabulary can be expanded later when these basic structures have been mastered through practice.

7. Principle of Teaching the Problems

The child invariably learns first language and second language in a school situation. It is also very true that there exist a lot of structural differences between the first language and the second language. These can be termed as problems. Though these are not exactly problems; they require conscious understanding. The teacher need not concentrate on these aspects in the beginning itself and teach the problems to the students. Instead, the teacher can present language in meaningful situations. This helps the students pick up language and its use clearly. Practice of language in situations will make the student learn language without any confusion.

8. Principle of Writing as Representation of Speech

This principle means to say that teaching of the graphic symbols and the associations of these symbols with the language units they represent are separate tasks. It also implies that teaching reading and writing are distinct from teaching speech and should not be confused with it. Language learning is based on LSRW skills. The conventional and scientific principles of learning emphasize that language learning starts with the teaching of listening first. This can be done with the help of narration, stories, play-way methods and games. This orientation assists the students to speak. The teacher questions the student, elicits answers and makes it convenient for the student to interact. This is followed by intensive and extensive reading practice given with the help of prescribed reading material. After all these skills are mastered, writing can be finally taught as graphic representation of language units and patterns that the student already knows. It is also a psychologically proven method because sufficient knowledge of spoken language will always help one to read and write better.

9. Principle of Graded Patterns

Patterns should be taught gradually in cumulative graded steps especially in second language teaching. This principle specifies that it is better to teach with the help of sentence patterns, rather than with the words. Early in teaching, there should be graded questions and responses, request and greetings as well as statements. This can be followed by sub-sentence elements such as, parts of speech, structure of sentences; words and modification structures. Later on, we can add new element or pattern to previous ones.

For example, one can teach questions with `do' form (Do you understand?) before teaching questions with interrogative words (What do you understand?). Once the `do' pattern has been taught, the what, when, where questions are more easily presented and understood. The whole of the language cannot be taught at one stretch. Even a child when learning second language can be taught the content which is selected and graded based on the frequency of how the words occur, the range, and limitation of the word, convenience and usability of the word in known situations, the scope of the word and the teach ability of the word.

10. Principle of Language Practice versus Translation

It is a universal fact that languages are equal and important. But it is also true that no two languages are similar. There is no possibility of complete equivalents or substitutes in any two languages. Hence, word-to-word translations are impossible. If at all the translation is done, it tends to produce incorrect constructions. Psychologically, the process of translation is more complex, different and unnecessary for learning the LSRW skills. Several linguists like P. Gurrey support the theory that the teaching of mother-tongue and the teaching of a foreign language can support each other. It may be easy to get the meaning and learn about the differences in two languages this way, but this translation is only a last resort in the teaching of a second language. Instead, it is better to teach language through practice as it gives more concret knowledge and enough room for the student to learn the language.

11. Principle of Authentic Language Standards

A language has to be taught as it is. A language is a structure of communication and no single dialect can be accepted as standard, the usage of people using the language should be taken into consideration. This principle implies to say that the language used by people is authentic. While it is being taught it has to be kept in mind that usage of language occupies prominent place in the learning of language.

12. Principle of Practice

The student must be given practice in learning a language. Especially when it is a second language situation, the student must be engaged in practice most of the learning time. This principle has a psychological justification too as the performance of learning is in direct proportion to the amount of practice. Once the students acquire the LSRW skills, they should be drilled by making them do the work with the help of many assignments. The correlation with real life helps the students learn the language situationally and more meaningfully.

13. Principle of Shaping Responses

In language-learning, the student finds it difficult to produce or hear the elements and structures different from those of his first language. This principle recommends two treatments to sharpen the response of the students while learning the first language. One method of teaching and shaping responses is to break up the response into smaller parts, practice and then attempt full response. In another way, responses can be shaped by giving articulator clues or other hints to help the student approximate the response. For teaching vocabulary and grammar, hints can ably be given to elicit proper responses. Similarly, for teaching verbs, tenses, etc., visual aids, diagrams, sketches; substitution tables can be used to get right responses.

14. Principle of Language in Situations

We communicate with each other to express our thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions with the help of language. Language is a social, cultural and geographical phenomenon. Man acquires language skills when one is exposed to real situations in the society one is living in. Even in a contrived or classroom situation, practicing language items can help in acquiring language. Proper use of motivating aids and illustrations in creating situations can be more meaningful in teaching the learning process for meaningful acquisition of language.

15. Principle of Learning as the Crucial Outcome

Language could be taught with scientific precision. Teaching is primarily for learning rather than for entertaining. For example, the entire language learning can be based on LSRW Skills. For instance, take a textual passage. When this is read to make the students listen to it, they will try to recognize the known concepts and words. The introduction of vocabulary and structures will help them get

motivated. This also encourages them to speak. Also the students may be made to read out the same passage. Finally, they may also be given writing exercises. In a scientific approach, the amount of learning outweighs interest. Once the effectiveness of a technique is demonstrated, working to make it more absorbing is not necessary. These are the principles of language learning that give better scope for learning, especially a second language. These principles emphasize that teaching of a language should be done as naturally as possible. The child should be motivated so that he feels enthusiastic to learn the language. The above-discussed principles make it clear that language when acquired is influenced by various factors both psychological and sociological. Let us now study what these factors are and how they influence the learning of the language.

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