



SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION TEST: A CASE STUDY ON PG STUDENTS OF SIDHO-KANHO-BIRSHA UNIVERSITY OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The classroom-centric micro-level research gained a sudden interest among the researchers both in developed and developing countries as neo-Marxist social structures are importing more and more substantial vista of multicultural population in the classroom scenario. These multicultural trends in classroom daily presence and institutional enrolment brought multilingual echoes in more convenient texture. Multicultural population and gathering of multilingual speaking community has really challenged the hard task of classroom teacher. Earlier, only subject knowledge of the teacher supplied every solitary demand of the learners. A twenty first century classroom cannot face the threshold of classroom without knowing the slow and inevitable entry of globalization. The study includes 60 PG level students of Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University who are pursuing their 4th semester. A simple second language acquisition test tool was designed to study the second language acquisition level of the learners.



KEY WORD: Second Language Acquisition, Reading Performance, Writing Exposure, Proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

A learner of language uses to learn his or her first language as a primary medium of communication from the childhood. But second language is indeed learnt out of needs and necessities – it may be for job orientation, academic purpose, entrepreneur, entertainment, travelling etc. Though language learning and language acquisition may seem similar in general; these two are slightly deferent from each other. And from 1980s, 'the acquisition and learning distinction has been shown to be useful in explaining a variety of phenomena in the field of second language acquisition (Krashen 4). Soho Song describes second language acquisition as 'a complex learning process affected by many linguistic, social, psycholinguistic and intercultural factors' (p. 1). And various persons defined proficiency in the matter of language, in multitudinous ways. "Nunan defined proficiency as the common language ability. Brumfit (1984) used fluency in lieu of proficiency and presented its definition as, "the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the student" (p. 543). Carter and Nunan (2001) defined proficiency as the ability to apply the second language for communicative purposes. For Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) proficiency refers to the degree of skill with which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language. Proficiency may be measured through the use of a proficiency test."(Gharbavi and et. all, p. 113). However, this study especially focuses on assessing proficiency level of second language acquisition through proficiency test and thereby finding the probable causes that hamper in achieving competency among those referred students. However, it will be helpful for both the second language learners and teachers to find solutions of these assumed general problems.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the last few decades, interest among the researchers about second language acquisition and its process grows gradually but a little has probably been done upon the study of proficiency test on second language acquisition especially, in English. Sooho Song shows his interest upon second language acquisition and tries to establish a new approach on 'second language acquisition as a mode-switching process' (Song). Claire Kramersch investigates 'the proficiency movement' which was flourished with publication of the "American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (1986)". Soon after its publication, researchers had shown their growing interest in using this scale for testing proficiency among second language learners. Kramersch studies 'three recent publications' of that time and testifies 'to the growing importance of the "proficiency movement" and chronicle its development: *Teaching for Proficiency*, edited by Higgs (1984), lays the ground concepts of the movement; *Teaching Language in Context*, by Omaggio (1986), gives it a theoretical base and provides a variety of proficiency-oriented activities; and *Defining and Developing Proficiency*, edited by Byrnes and Canale (1987), broadens the definition of proficiency and responds to the concerns of second language acquisition (SLA) researchers with respect to the validity of the ACTFL proficiency scale' (p. 355). And Kramersch also makes an approach to justify the validity of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and further shows that 'the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are inadequate as a teaching tool; in addition, they are in opposition to what we currently know to be true about SLA [Second Language Acquisition]; finally, they do not account for learner variability in communicative growth'(p. 355). Annie Tremblay tries to 'sensitize SLA researchers to the importance of documenting and controlling for proficiency in experimental SLA research that seeks to explain the linguistic knowledge or behaviour of L2 learners' (p. 340). However few scholars try their hand in different ways unlike them and make some assumptions with various aspects. Gharbavi and Mousavi show that, 'there is a direct relationship between employment of different [learning] strategies and proficiency levels' (p. 1). L. Saranraj and K. Meenakshi study the effect of anxiety among students that comes as an obstacle to the proficiency of their language acquisition. They claimed that, 'ESL [English as Second Language] learners are more anxious to use English inside and outside the classroom' (p. 1). Banu and Nishanthi (2017) study the 'difficulties' of college students in speaking English from the sociological perspectives. They have probably found the problem in our educational process and system, limited access to English class and English educational environment and inadequate reading, listening habits towards second language learning and acquisition. However this case study has not been justified by any scales of such rather makes a clear descriptive approach to find and assume the causes that may occur as barriers in the way of proficiency about second language acquisition by compare and contrast.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to collect primary data to complete this study. Participants were invited one by one to read a particular chosen excerpt from English loudly in front of examiner and also invited to answer the questions given to them in written form with a schedule to collect personal information. Only PG students of the Department of English were asked to respond to the questionnaire and their responses were guaranteed to be confidential.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

To complete this study, sample of sixty students were selected from the department of English of Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, West Bengal, India. The sample profile is given in Table no. 1.

Sample Profile: Table no. 1

Primary data of students					Total number of students participated
Gender	Male		Female		
Residence	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	60
No. of students participated	10	26	12	12	

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are stated hereunder:

- To surmise the proficiency in English as a second language acquisition among the PG students of English language and literature of S.K.B. University.
- To compare the competency in second language acquisition within the same academic position and same classroom.
- To examine and compare the proficiency level between male and female students of same PG course.
- To testify the proficiency level of students from their residential aspects i.e. from urban and rural locality of the students.
- To understand the proficiency level of second language acquisition by comparing the urban male and urban female students of the same university.
- To understand the proficiency level of second language acquisition by comparing the rural male and rural female students of same department of S.K.B. University.
- To find the causes as problematic factors in achieving proficiency in second language acquisition by comparing the proficiency level between urban male and rural male students of the aforesaid institution.
- To understand the proficiency level of second language acquisition by comparing the urban female and rural female students of S.K.B. University.
- To study the proficiency level of those students by comparing the urban males and rural females in the matter of second language acquisition.
- To study the proficiency level of those students by comparing the urban females and rural males in the matter of second language acquisition.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

In this study, we will try to analyse cases and their faults from the perspective of second language acquisition by grouping them, and calculating and comparing their scores. First of all, it is noticed that 36 students are male and 24 students are female among the participants of this case study. If we calculate the average score of all the male students, then we can find that they have scores 19.72 in average which is 1.11 less than the average scores of all the female participants as the female participants have scored 20.83 in average. However, median score shows that male students have performed well than the female participants because half of the male students scores above 22 while female students have scores 21. However, the different number of the students can be a problem to the examiner to infer the overall quality of the participants, as it can mislead the result. And the average score may vary with the growing number of samples and their performances. But if we look at the scores of urban female and rural female participants who have appeared with same number of participants, we can say that urban female participants have scored better than the urban males because their median score is 23 and 21 respectively. And their average score proposition is 21.67: 20. So, it is clear that overall performance of urban female participants is better than the rural male participants. However, if we compare the performance of rural male and female characters then we can see that their median score is the same, while average score of the female

participants is better than male students as their average score proposition is 19.615: 20. And in comparing the performance of the urban male with the rural male participants, we can state that their median is same but average proposition is 20 : 19.615. While urban male and rural female have the same average scores and the same median scores also, rural male and urban female participants have not. Rather their average score proposition is 19.615: 21.67 and the proposition of their median score is 21: 23. However, it can be said that in respective of all rural and urban; male and female students – urban female participants of the Department of English have performed much better than rest of the other participants.

Detail scores of the group of students with their mean and median: Table no. 2

Group of students	Total score	Mean	Median
Rural Male	510	19.615	21
Rural Female	240	20	21
Urban Male	200	20	21
Urban Female	260	21.67	23

If we go in detailing these participants’ performances, then it would be more informational. Keeping this in mind, if we study the overall performance of the students about the proficiency of their second language acquisition, then we can find that they have some problems in common, about pronunciation, reading, understanding the meaning, using punctuation etc. First of all, analysis of their comprehension will be based upon the reading the passage that had given to them at the time of examining. This passage is stated below:

Joyce alludes to Carroll, then, but already had much of his own method. It's worth pausing over the similarities and differences between the two writers, because we may understand the difficulty of Joyce's work better if we do – understand it better, that is, rather than diminish it. Both Carroll and Joyce are interested in puns as forms of criticism of behaviour, even portraits of behaviour's secret life. When we learn in Alice of a school where the pupils are taught 'Reeling and Writhing ... and then the different branches of - Arithmetic Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision', we quickly translate the terms back into their ordinary classroom relatives, and then realise we shouldn't be translating at all: it's in their immediate, literal forms that an education is being identified. Similarly Joyce's savage parody in *Ulysses* of the Apostles' Creed as it might unofficially sound for the English requires us only to remember the echo of what it's not. They were instructed to read it carefully in front of the examiner. But except two students, more or less everyone makes some mistakes.

If we carefully observe and tally their pronunciation, then we can notice that they are pronouncing words by some self constructed utterances. For example, they are pronouncing ‘Apostles’ as ‘Apostel’ or ‘Apostale’; ‘echo’ as ‘eko’; ‘pausing’ as ‘pou-zing’ and the word ‘secret’ as ‘sek-rate’. Probably they are careless about enquiring correct pronunciation and trying to form utterance of words by assuming similarity with other words of that type, like ‘gentle’, ‘paunch’, ‘second’ etc.

Some of these students have problem in reading fluently making some unwanted stopping during reading. For example, few of them stop their reading at ‘Aliceof’ and probably tried to decipher what it actually is – a printing mistake and would it be ‘Alice of’? Or it is the ‘name of a school’. And also the seemed to be confused frequently about pronouncing the word ‘shouldn’t’. They are taking time to think that whether it should be read as ‘shouldn’t’ or ‘should not’. And therefore, they are making some unwanted pause and stopping while reading.

There are also some cases that could not be overlooked. When they are noticing some words that are not familiar with their day to day usage like ‘Arithmetic’ ‘Uglification’, they are either pronouncing incorrectly or making some unwanted stopping.

Few of them are reading the portion 'Reeling and Writhing' as 'Reading and Writing'. The reason behind such mistake can be assumed as carelessness of the reader during reading and forget to notice the words rightly.

Sometimes they have no clear concept about the meaning of words therefore making some inferences about the meaning when they were instructed to write synonyms of some given words. They were given to make sentence with following word:

- I. Allude
- II. Diminish
- III. Portraits

And also said to write synonyms of these words that are stated below,

- I. Realise
- II. Savage
- III. Require

But their performance is not so good in giving those answers.

Some students constructed a sentence with the word 'diminish' incorrectly. They probably did not know the meaning of the word and therefore assumed its self-constructed meaning by keeping in mind the very word 'dim'. With this assumption, they made sentences like 'The light starts diminish'.

Sometimes they become confused with two words and their meanings, probably because of their lack of use in daily life. For example, they are making sentence with the word 'diminish' but thinking it as 'demolish'. As few of them are writing the sentences like 'I had no interest to diminish your family in front of all', 'Self arrogance diminish our life', 'It is good idea to diminish the unfulfilled job', 'A man diminishes his wife's life', 'Everything is diminish in bad time in our life', 'Government diminish a building because is in danger'. Few student responses by its structural similarity with other words like 'finish' and answers as 'he diminished all of his work', 'It will be better than it will diminish'.

However some of them were not well acquainted with the word and left it blank though they are students of PG course in English language and literature.

Even few of them are not able to form a sentence structure correctly. In the aforementioned examples it can clearly be seen that they have not accustomed with the grammatical rules.

Moreover if we talk about the word 'allude', we can find that few students have done mistake by understanding its meaning as 'say' or 'speak' in making the sentences. For example, some students have written sentences with the word 'allude' as follows:

'The man alludes a boy to correct the sentence', 'He alludes me to do the teaching job', 'Ram alludes Ramesh not to violate law and order', 'Someone alludes to do something'.

Probably, it also gets clear about their vocabulary in English with the synonymous words that were instructed to write. Only two of them write incorrectly as 'barbarism', and 'barbarity' for the synonym of 'savage'. It is probably reflecting their lack of knowledge about 'parts of speech' of English language. However, maximum of them, have answered the rest questions either correctly or left blank.

SUGGESTION

From the aforesaid analysis and interpretation, we can make some inferences through discussion about the probable solutions of those problems that occurred as barriers in achieving proficiency in second language acquisition.

First of all, to fix the problem in self-constructed pronunciations, students should have to be careful. While they will get acquainted with some new diction, they must consult phonological term of that new word. It not only gives them the way for correcting pronunciation, but also it will enhance their phonological knowledge. They can also consult auditory devices or technological gadgets for proper pronunciation

available to them. We should have to give emphasis not only on vocabulary of English language, but also about the enhancement of phonological terms side by side through our educational curriculum.

Secondly, if we talk about their unwanted stopping during reading, we can have also some suggestions to better their reading skill. The students should have to read books, news papers, and articles in English more and more to increase their comprehension level. Especially, loud reading is seemed to be much more effective in enhancing their reading skill. At the same time, they should be careful about the punctuations of English language during reading. They can also form peer groups to communicate in their second language which may bring some efficacy to their speaking power in second language. Teachers can help them to diagnose the problems in attitude, aptitude, personality, technique and in other areas that need to change to develop speaking and reading skills.

Thirdly, they need to increase their vocabulary not only for the benefits in their subject but also for overall acquisition of second language. Because, it is often time noticed that these students of English language and literature get interested only in their subject related words and vocabulary. They get stuck in their subject of study. Therefore, they remained unfamiliar with vocabulary outside their familiarity. As some cases are found who cannot properly pronounce the word 'Arithmetic'; it is perhaps because of their limited access to vocabulary. They can probably increase their vocabulary by more reading outside their curriculum and also by communicating to other in their second language.

Fourthly, assuming a word meaning or self-constructing a word meaning out of similarity with other words, will not help them properly to the acquisition of second language. They need to take help of dictionary, encyclopaedia or some knowledgeable persons like teachers while they encounter some unfamiliar words. And it will be comprehensible to them gradually probably by proper utilization of the newly learned word in making sentences. Moreover, attentiveness and carefulness towards listening, speaking, reading and writing are very much essential in increasing proficiency in language acquisition. As in this way, we also have learnt and acquired our first language. It will also help a language learner from becoming confused about apparently similar words and their meaning as previously noted examples of 'diminish' and 'demolish'.

Fifthly, grammatical errors, erroneous sentence structure, improper use of parts of speech in English are not expected from a PG student of English as they have got more advantages in learning their second language through its language and literature. Therefore it can be assumed that acquisition of second language have not made proficiently from their school education. And we need more planning to the betterment our school educational system and its curriculum to improve our second language acquisition proficiently.

CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows that, acquisition of second language has not been done properly among the PG students of the department of English then what can we expect from school students or PG students of other departments. Few students have scored well in this proficiency test but rest of the other have not. They have lack of interest, confidence, attitude, aptitude, comprehension, vocabulary, understanding the grammatical rules of the second language and so on. The cause may be assumed as their various drawbacks like their backward class, unprivileged locality, first generation to learn English as second language and their multi-lingualistic nature etc. However, it is necessary to change in the very process of teaching and learning second language. A time to time evaluation is much needed to test their competency in second language learning as well as in second language acquisition. This type of steps should be taken from the very ground level of our school education. A new course can be introduced into the school curriculum about language learning and language acquisition that can help them acquiring English proficiently at the tender age.

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