

TRANSFER OF LEARNING TO ACQUISITION: COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH CONTRIBUTION

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Abstract

This essay discusses a controversy the author notices in the Language Acquisition theories. The author sees that a controversy over the transfer of learnt knowledge to acquisition exists between two outstanding experts in the field. The author proposes some arguments and conditions for the transfer to take place. For the clarity of the discussion, several relevant theories are reviewed as the background from which the problem arises.

Keywords: *learning, acquisition, communicative approach.*

Introduction

In the efforts of uncovering the mystery of human language acquisition, theories concerning first language (L1) acquisition and its relation to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have been built, tested, refined, or even discarded. Occasionally, those theories complement each other in that one theory completes the other. In other cases, the relation is contradictory where one hypothesis refutes the other. Often, controversies occur within one theory itself and, in this case, it is the observers that are frequently aware of the gap in the theory. One example of that situation is the case to be seen in this paper. The author recognizes an existing controversy within Stephen Krashen's (1981) Monitor hypothesis and Rod Ellis' (1982) remark on the hypothesis in his article 'Informal and formal approaches to communicative language teaching'.

Acquisition-Learning Distinction and the Monitor Hypothesis

First of all, it is important to see a distinction between acquisition and learning. Krashen (1981) clearly specifies the language acquisition as "...the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language..."(1). This statement means that it is an outcome of a subconscious process. In acquiring the first language, a child undergoes a subconscious procedure that

delivers to him/her the possession of language skills in the first language the child uses. Invariably, children are always stubborn learners. When a child makes a mistake in using the language, one of his/her parents usually tries to correct the mistake and teach him/her to produce the correct form for the appropriate message. However, the child is usually resistant to the change and keeps making the same mistake. In fact, Krashen's claim in relation to the subconscious process through which children acquire the first language explains this stubbornness. Krashen (1981) also defines acquisition as "...the process of acquiring (first) language that requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the message they are conveying and understanding" (5). He claims that the process of acquiring language and internalizing rules of the language must be subconscious. Meaningful and social occasions also play a very important role in facilitating the acquisition process. One can acquire a language only if he/she involves in natural communicative interaction with other persons in the target language because the purpose of his/her activity is to get the message across. The communicator at that time is not concerned with the accuracy of form in which the message is wrapped but with the counterpart's correct grasp and acceptance of the information. In short, four key words helping facilitate the acquisition should be picked up from this hypothesis i.e. subconsciousness, meaningfulness, naturalness, and content-orientation.

Furthermore, Krashen (1981) classified learning as the product of 'formal instruction' in formal studies and it comprises a conscious process that results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language; for example, knowledge of grammar rules. Krashen in Ellis (1982) also suggested that learning results from and can be influenced by formal study (74). It is true that in the process of acquiring the first language, children cannot easily be influenced to produce as correct a form as their parents can. However, they will observe and subconsciously internalize the language rules people around them use daily. Gradually, the children test the rules by producing their own sentences and, when they see some rejection from the adults as they are producing the sentences, they reformulate and reproduce the sentences to resemble the adult's expression. Then, when the children go to school and accept instruction in the language rules in formal study, their internalized rules can be influenced and their language production begins to fit more closely to that of social as well as academic discourses. In this formal learning

stage, children assess the rules they had acquired before and begin classifying em to various discourses and genres. Indeed, this shows that learning is the refining phase in the language acquisition process. This is much clearer. From this overview, we can highlight also four key words leading to successful learning production i.e. consciousness, formal-study, correction-purpose, and form-orientation.

In the light of this distinction, Krashen (1981) argues that the process of acquisition is much more important since the conscious learning only serves as the monitor to the acquisition and, consequently, contributes less to the communicative ability in which the acquired knowledge plays its active role (5). For this claim, Krashen (1981) built his Monitor Hypothesis recognizing "...adults' two independent (interrelated) systems for developing ability in second languages, subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning..." (1). He argues that the language knowledge acquired from the acquisition is filtered and refined by the knowledge obtained from the learning process. At this point, the learnt knowledge functions to monitor the grammaticality of the product of the acquired knowledge in form of utterances (2) whether they are written or spoken. Ellis (1982) also states that the monitor is "...strategies learners develop for making appropriate use of their learnt knowledge..." (74). Therefore, there is no way the learnt knowledge replaces the function of the acquired knowledge to supply the utterances because the learnt knowledge's original existence represents the monitoring function over the outcome only; it is not used for the producing function.

In addition, there are several conditions by which the monitor functions significantly. The first condition is that second language (L2) performers must have enough 'time' to monitor their linguistic outcomes. The performers should spend sometime to check how grammatical their utterances are or have been because the coordinating speed of their learnt knowledge in assessing the accuracy will be much slower than that of the acquired knowledge. Otherwise, the monitor will contribute less and ineffectively because time pressure will effectively discourage the completion of the process. The next prerequisite for language monitoring to take place is that L2 performers must focus on form and suggest correction. A fully complete assessment on the correctness of the form is the objective of the monitoring process. The L2 performer must not think of the message delivery because their learnt knowledge only provides them with the tools of error-analysis and correction-suggestion. The last condition is that the L2 performers must know the rules of the target language. Obviously, knowing the rules is the inevitable requirement for

any kind of assessment process. If one has no idea about the rules of the target, there is no way he/she can identify any mistake or error and, consequently, propose solution or correction. Under these three conditions, an effective language monitoring function can be established.

The Controversy

Based on the overview, the author sees a controversy especially from the two experts (Krashen and Ellis). The former argues through his Monitor Hypothesis that "...the conscious learning is only available to the language performer ONLY as a monitor...(2)". Therefore, the nature of its presence is simply to monitor, assess, or evaluate the product of the acquired knowledge. The learnt knowledge consequently must not convert into the acquired competence. However, Ellis (1982) remarked that Krashen's view "...seems counter-intuitive and contrary to the experience of many language learners (Stevick: 1980 in Ellis: 1982), who are able to put learnt knowledge to rapid use in spontaneous conversation when the need arises... (80)". This remark shows that hypothetically the conversion is possible since the goal of the learning is also acquiring. Then, a question of 'what factors can make such allegedly impossible transfer to occur' I still don't know why you have quotation marks here; is this quote? then from whom and what is the page #? emerges. Krashen, whether or not he knows it, has actually provided the answer for this transfer through the Affective Filter Hypothesis and the attitudinal theory that promotes communicative approach application in language teaching situation. For this reason, this article will try to see how communicative approach application can contribute to the transfer of the learnt to the acquired knowledge.

DISCUSSION

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

One factor influencing the success of communicative approach is the roles of the affective filters. Krashen (1981) defines the affective filter as "...a number of affective variables (motivation, self confidence, and anxiety) playing a facilitative but non-causal role in SLA...". These affective filters, in one side, can be very facilitative and accelerative to the process of acquisition but, on the other, turn into an effectively preventive hindrance to the process of acquisition. For example, if an L2 performer has high motivation, high self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety, this learner has the potential for success in acquiring the language. In this case, the barrier the affective filter promotes becomes lower and enables the learner to proceed smoothly to the higher level of acquisition.

On the other hand, if the learner suffers low motivation, low self-confidence, a bad self-image, and a high level of anxiety, he/she has to deal with a high barrier that stops him/her from acquiring the language successfully. The process of acquisition can be very difficult and baffling to achieve. In other words, high affective filters can form a 'mental block' that discourages the learner from succeeding in the acquisition whereas low affective filters can facilitate the learner to achieve success.

Due to the significance of this affective filter, special strategies should be provided to help the learners to succeed in acquiring the language. To do so, an effective approach, i.e. communicative approach, in language teaching or language learning that enables the learners to lower their affective filters must be used.

Communicative Approach: Informal and Formal

As suggested by the adjective itself, the communicative approach is the term used for the approach that has the 'communicative' characteristics. Harmer (1982) proposes the characteristics as follows.

Intention

The original trait of communicative approach is to encourage the learners to have a 'desire' or 'want' to initiate act of communication. The communicative teaching should stimulate participants' need or desire to engage in communication with other participants as well as with the teacher.

Purpose

Having an intention, the approach should guide the participant to know and define his/her reasons and objectives to communicate. She/he may communicate to require information, ask help, order something or even only to maintain social relationship among the participants.

Interaction

Having the intention defined and the objective set, the participants must be introduced to a setting where they relate to each other. By this communicative approach, these participants can be made aware of their position (speaker to listener or vice versa) in order to get the intention across and meet the purpose.

Using Medium (Language)

All those activities must absolutely take a medium to occur, namely language. In this situation, the language used is the one stored or acquired.

Attaching these traits into any kinds of approach to language teaching can contribute significantly to the acquisition. The next question is how we can attach these traits to language teaching setting. Ellis (1982) divides the communicative approaches in two categories: Informal and Formal.

Informal Communicative Approach (Ellis: 1982)

The informal Communicative Approaches in language teaching setting are the ones that mostly promote acquisition. The learners acquire the language through activities that engage the learner in the process of actual communication in the classroom by emphasizing the use of language as a means to some behavioural end (such as performing a task or influencing the behaviour of others) (80). This setting stimulates the learners to take a part proactively in a communicative way for any communicative purposes. Teachers function to supervise and guide the activity of the learners. They do not act as the knowledge supplier but more as the 'onlooker' whose main concern is to ensure the learners proactively participate in the activity. Any effort of language-error correction is really not necessary, if not to say unexpected. Therefore, the concern of the informal approach is how fluent the flow of the 'process of communication' is and this surely leads to subconscious rules internalization i.e. acquisition.

Formal Communicative Approach (Ellis: 1982)

As to the formal one, the learners take a part in classroom situations where they are encouraged to make descriptions of the language. The language description is, indeed, the activity itself, making use either of taxonomies or language functions, or of accounts of the structures and strategies of discourse. The learners communicatively observe and analyse particular items in language in terms of structure, functions, and their use in various discourse. Here, teachers function traditionally as the rules supplier who pays attention to the importance of careful need analysis as a basis for material selection. Teachers in formal communicative approach should involve the learners to choose the items for the materials in order to ensure their active participation. Otherwise, the activity cannot be counted as 'communicative' because the learners should observe items that are interesting for them. Then, teachers' role here is to function traditionally as the 'knower' but as modestly as possible. In fact, the teachers may let the students find out the rule by themselves. Only when the dispute is unsolved, the teacher restores their rigid traditional role as the knowledge supplier. This act is extremely necessary in order to make sure the learners subconsciously internalize the rules or knowledge about items for their acquisition. By involving them in the material selection, the teachers have influenced them to have some expectation of the discussion on the items they had also selected and, thus, provoked their curiosity, which results in their eagerness to fulfil the expectations. If their expectation is

met, the students will be impressed that they had guessed correctly and, not only convincingly but also subconsciously, internalize the newly acquired knowledge. However, if their expectation is not met, they will feel impressed not the best word choice and change their preliminary guess in accordance with the new discovery. As the result, they store the new knowledge about the item effectively in their subconscious knowledge store. Of course, through this approach, the learners have the purpose of learning in which their learnt knowledge as the product of the activity can be later used directly, depending on how intense the impression they got during the activity, to produce language expressions as well as to monitor their language performance.

Having discussed all theories relevant to the acquisition and learning, we can see that the possibility of the transfer of the learnt knowledge is certainly available. In fact, the two forms of communicative approach discussed later are accommodative to the immediate use of language to produce immediate responses in spontaneous activities. This means that the transfer can occur from the learnt to the acquired knowledge. Ellis (1982) suggests that "...by offering opportunity to participate in authentic communication, they cater directly for acquisition..." When the learners are invited to produce authentic forms of communication and then guided to develop the outcome to other relevant genres, they have added more to their acquired knowledge bank because they get the impression that what they have just acquired is also useful and applicable in other circumstances. At the same time, supplying communicative opportunity in communicative approaches serves as the 'switch' that starts the flow of the learnt to the acquired knowledge.

However, there are three conditions for this transfer to take place: communicativeness, genre-based communicative activities, and the significance of teacher's role.

Communicativeness

The first condition is the application of the 'communicative' traits in any kinds of approach used, namely formal or informal. Through this communicativeness, the learners are deliberately involved and actively participate in the activity right from scratch. Thus, their affective filter is lowered and their awareness of the activity's goal is high. The learners value the activity highly because they are getting into a foreign area that is actually interesting for them. Therefore, the learners must have some expectation of the goal and the function of the activity. They should think see might be better that the activity

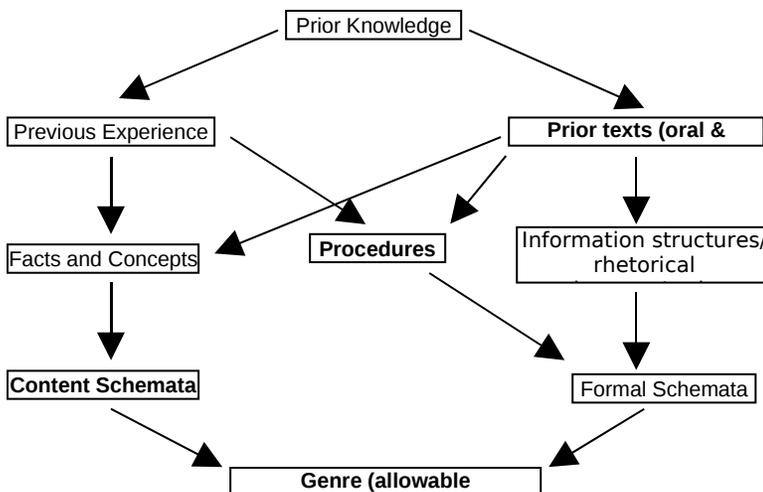
results in a new skill, knowledge, or a new technique they can use later for their own need. If the result meets their expectation, a new knowledge will be stored as the learnt knowledge because the learners' guess is affirmed. If the outcome does not meet the expectation, the learners will be surprised. Then, their curiosity will lead them to further investigate the field until they can satisfy themselves. This ends in acquisition because the learners subconsciously internalize the rules through their conscious learning.

Genre-Based Communicative Activities

The second condition is to apply genre-based language learning in the communicative approach language teaching. As

Figure 1

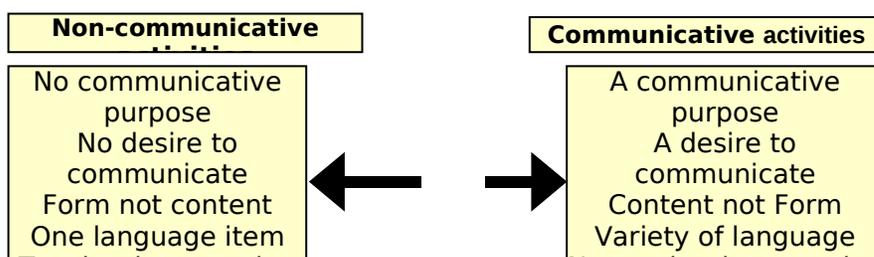
Swale's Diagram not correct - give it the same title Swales gave it and then referenced as usual (1990)



shown in Swale's Diagram (1990) on Prior Knowledge's Role in

Allowable Contributions, the learners' prior knowledge either from the aspect of the facts and concepts or from that of structures and forms contributes new knowledge by means of genre-based activities. In genre-based classroom activity, learners engage themselves in activities by which they identify themselves as a part of a culture of a community. Here, any traits of communication must be involved; the learners' active participation in the material selection as well as their desire or initiative to communicate must be encouraged' otherwise the learners will find themselves reluctant because of not consciously feeling the necessity to become involved in the activity. If one participant, for example, is discouraged, he/she will be, consequently, not confident, embarrassed, anxious, and have a low self-image, which indicates a high level of affective filter. At this point, the transfer is unlikely to happen. In short, the genre-based activity seems to be a facilitative factor for the transfer of the learnt to acquired knowledge because the learners should internalize the basic rules of the genre they have formally but communicatively learnt.

Next is a diagram of being Communicative or Not Communicative by Harmer (1982):



Harmer's Diagram (1982) Figure - 2

This diagram shows that in a genre-based activity the criterion of being a communicative activity must be met. The learner must be stimulated to have a desire to communicate and achieve a communicative purpose. It is the content of the activity that matters. The learners use a variety of language form to get the message across. Teachers should, if not must, not intervene in the activity either by their own personal or material intervention. Personal intervention means that the teachers personally attend the group and interrupt the activity by, such as, correcting language or giving detailed instruction. The other kind of intervention is, through rigid material

organization, by restricting the learner to confine themselves to the items being discussed and not encouraging them to extrapolate to other relevant situations; thus, the teacher intervenes in the activity through the material. This should be avoided because the very focus of the activity is to enable students to produce and develop their authentic forms of the language items in any appropriate settings.

The Significance of Teachers' Role

As we have just mentioned, the other condition for the transfer lies in the role that teachers play. The teachers must not act as the 'knower', assessor, corrector, or other kinds of authoritative role. They must reduce this popular role as modestly as possible. They can restore this role only by the students' invitation. There is another slight chance for the intervention in the case of worsening discussion among or between students that will inhibit the process of the activity from flowing smoothly. In other words, the teachers must have a student-centred focus in which they tend to negotiate rather than prescribe, encourage rather than discourage, and be permissive of variation rather than restrictive because they know that the students' background must be respected and supported as a prominent asset for their development. Furthermore, in SLA, teacher's role in communicative language learning is to promote acculturation (Schuman: 1978 in Ellis: 1985) in which the degree of a learner's acculturation to the target language group will control the degree to which she/he acquires the second language. Therefore, being prescriptive and assertive is not helpful in this communicative process.

Closing Remarks

To conclude, this article again is in favour of Ellis' (1982) suggestion that the transfer of the learnt to the acquired knowledge is likely to happen due to communicative approach contribution. The learnt knowledge can serve not only as the monitor for the language operation but also as the producer of language expressions that serve the immediate need for information or reply in spontaneous communicative situations. However, the transfer must meet the following conditions:

- 1) Communicative characteristics are fully employed in the learning or teaching activity.
- 2) Teacher's role as facilitator and the 'onlooker' is high, as the corrector minimum.
- 3) Communicative genre-based activities centred on students whose authentic various creations of the text of a particular genre are allowed and even encouraged.
- 4) The activities are content-focused instead of process-focused.

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