Promoting Second Language Development in Fijian Classrooms

Manpreet Kaur
The University of Fiji, Saweni, Lautoka, Fiji
Email: manpreetk@unifiji.ac.fj

Priyatma Singh
The University of Fiji, Saweni, Lautoka, Fiji
Email: priyatmas@unifiji.ac.fj

Abstract

In an endeavor to fathom the distinction between first language acquisition (L1), to that of second language acquisition (L2), scholars have examined and drawn attention to myriad theories. These theories can aid language facilitators here in Fiji to comprehend and recognize language learning and to assist their students in their language learning process. More so, this paper aims to discuss and weigh the diverse teaching approaches that exist and can promote Second Language Development (SLD). Firstly, it will consider four approaches namely the Grammar-translation, Reading, Community Language Teaching and the Total Physical Response. Secondly, it will highlight ideas from an instructor’s perspective on what needs to be done in the classroom to support SLD. Thirdly, it will look at the curriculum based on Fiji’s context and what the Ministry of Education (MOE) can do to encourage SLD in languages like English, French and Chinese that are offered to students in Fiji. Finally, it will assert that any given method is only effective as its implementation. The essay will conclude that for Second Language Development all relevant stakeholders need to collaborate for this to work at the end of the day.

Keywords: Fiji, Second Language Development, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Language Instructor.
Introduction
Diverse theories have been mentioned in order to describe first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition. With the intention of understanding the nature of L1 and L2 language acquisition, various aspects were investigated, evaluated, and distinguished. Findings from these comparisons and contrasts have valuable implications for language teachers which can assist instructors here in Fiji to design their syllabuses, teaching pedagogies and classroom activities. These results also facilitate the language instructor to realize the learners learning processes. Many characteristics of L2 acquisition were highlighted by studies conducted on the issue of Interlanguage. “Interlanguage hypothesis was established in the 1970s and 1980s to accentuate the dynamic traits of language change that make the Interlanguage a distinctive structure. Selinker (1969, cited in McLaughlin, 1987) defines Interlanguage as the provisional grammars constructed by second language learners on their way to the target language. Interlanguage is the learner's developing second language knowledge and has some characteristics of the learner's native language, of the second language, and some characteristics which seem to be broad-spectrum and tend to transpire in all or most Interlanguages.” It is systematic, dynamic and constantly evolving. Interlanguages have some common characteristics with L1 acquisition, because both share similar developmental sequences. Some of the characteristics of L2 acquisition show similarities with L1 acquisition, whereas others show differences.

On the onset, language is a vehicle through which humans communicate. In this era of rapid industrialization and technological development, there is a greater need than ever to place emphasis on language, its communicative needs and the roles language play in allowing people to interact, socialize and understand. Here in Fiji, English is one such example of a language that draws ones attention to. Being considered as a second or third language besides one’s mother tongue, for the speakers in the Pacific, this holds true as well as using this language as the means to instruct in the school system and in the corporate sector. There is no denial that at the backdrop of this gigantic need to learn and master the English Language, facilitators and instructors teaching the language today are faced with an up-hill battle to further improve literacy levels and this can only be achieved by selecting the most effective teaching approaches/pedagogies to utilize inside the classroom. As such this paper aims to investigate some of the effective teaching approaches, facilitators attitude and preparation to promote Second Language development as well as to assess which would be applicable in the Fiji context since studies have indicated that there is no one method that truly is perfect. The Ministry of Education in Fiji.

Language Development
Language is made up of communally shared rules that include: what words mean, for instance “bank” can refer to a financial institution that accepts deposits from the public and creates credits or a river mouth, and the formation of new words, such as, kind, kindly, unkind, how to put words together (e.g., “Timoci went to the market” rather than “market Timoci went to the”) and what word combinations are best in what situations (“Would you mind moving your foot?” could quickly change to “Get off my foot, please!” if the first request did not produce results). Also, it is pertinent to comprehend the distinction between language and speech. While language is a
vehicle through which one communicates, speech means producing the sounds that form words. It is a physical activity that is controlled by the brain. Speech requires coordinated, precise movement from the tongue, lips, jaw, palate, lungs and voice box. This process is known as the manner of articulation. While a child acquires a language, with it the speech develops and articulation, voice and fluency are three domains in speech development. These two aspects are inseparable components that will ensure a child acquires language in a natural manner.

In addition, language acquisition is the ability to acquire, comprehend, master or fathom a language. For any child, acquiring the first language that is the mother tongue takes place between 0-5 years. Most of the learning takes place in an informal setting and acquired through imitation, listening, positive reinforcement provided by the parents or care givers. Grammar acquisition in first language is innate. However, second language development takes place in a formal setting. The instructor is tasked to teach the language that the child is eager to learn. This requires a lot of patience, drilling of concepts, scaffolding and other various strategies to teach a second language. Also, grammar acquisition in second language is not implicit as in L1 but rather explicit. Grammar is taught to learners. Similarly, as Krashen (1982) claims that there are two ways for an adult to approach a second language: "adults can 'acquire,' which is the way children 'get' their first language, subconsciously, through informal, implicit learning. Once you have acquired something you're not always aware you have done it. It just feels natural; it feels as if it has always been there. Quite distinct from acquisition is conscious learning. This is having a sound knowledge and awareness about language, explicit, formal linguistic knowledge of the language." (p.17) Krashen continues to argue that learning does not turn into acquisition. He obviously sees first language acquisition and second language acquisition as two different phenomena. Yet, he suggests that acquisition may occur in the classroom when communication is emphasized through dialogues, role playing, and other meaningful interaction. As a language teacher, one should be careful when evaluating the claims related to acquisition and learning. Through focused input and focused practice learning may turn into acquisition.

Added to that, in order to teach second language, the instructor needs to focus on myriad pedagogies that will best suit a given classroom. The instructor cannot fully rely on one given strategy to teach a second language. Theorist claim that both first and second language acquisition differs as the process and stages are different. Also, the duration to acquire L1 is from 0-5 years while in L2 it begins once the learner enters formal setting to learn another language. L2 had six stages of development and it begins from 6 years onwards. These differences in duration and stages together with the nature of learning play a pivotal role. The obligation on the facilitator teaching L2 is to be sensitive to the needs of the learner and give allowance for the child to use code-switching at times when the learner falls short of comprehending a particular concept. Once the classroom milieu is supportive and scaffolding is provided to the learner, L2 learning will be enjoyable and easy for the learners to grasp.

Grammar Translation Approach
To begin with, there are the different approaches that already exist. Firstly, is the Grammar-Translation Approach where students are given instructions relating to grammar that focuses on form and inflection of words? Facilitators are encouraged to use the mother tongue and vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated word lists. Also, rules about grammar are taught to
students and pronunciation is given little or no attention at all. Unfortunately, this is given little attention in the Fiji context since most English teachers prefer Literature over Language (linguistics). A similar sentiment that was highlighted by Maharaj (2014, p. 11) who mentioned that “…there is a failure to recognize the nature of English in Fiji ….” Additionally, literature and language is taught as one subject who contributes to an extent to the poor literacy. Nevertheless, this approach provides minimum opportunity for real second-language development and exercise drills to practice new structures can be tiresome to both teacher and student. However, the Grammar Translation method embraces a wide range of approaches but, broadly speaking, foreign language study is seen as a mental discipline, the goal of which may be to read literature in its original form or simply to be a form of intellectual development. The basic approach is to analyze and study the grammatical rules of the language, usually in an order roughly matching the traditional order of the grammar of Latin, and then to practice manipulating grammatical structures through the means of translation both into and from the mother tongue.

In addition, this method is predominantly based on the written word and texts are extensively in evidence. An archetypal approach would be to present the rules of a particular item of grammar, exemplify its use by including the item several times in a text, and practice using the item through writing sentences and translating it into the mother tongue. The text is often accompanied by a vocabulary list consisting of new lexical items used in the text together with the mother tongue translation. Accurate use of language items is central to this approach. Figure 1 depicts the myriad approaches that can be of benefit to the learner while teaching second language in class through an integrated approach in grammar translation. It is pertinent to note that a child learning second language needs a conducive and congenial milieu as well as motivation and the drive to keep the learning of second language intact by constant engagement with related activities in class.

**Figure 1: Language learning Cycle for Grammar Translation Activity**

![Figure 1: Language learning Cycle for Grammar Translation Activity](http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index)
Reading Approach

Moreover, the Reading Approach as the name suggests promotes reading. Participants are first encouraged to read and improve reading ability. Teachers in this case facilitate students’ fluency, vocabulary and the ability to handle complex grammatical constructions. It is interesting to note that students are given the freedom to select their own reading materials and vocabulary expands rapidly. Here the question of reading material is debatable as books are now available online and can be easily accessed through smart-phones. There is also the audio book where students listen to what is being read out. These varieties provide our students with options suited to their learning preferences. According to Zickuhr and Rainie (2014:19) the proportion of Americans reading books is growing but few have replaced books for electronic versions. This method helps students to unconsciously acquire language (Krashen 1981); they are able to make connections with what they read to what background information they already know. Makes learning through reading more meaningful, interesting and above all else, creates a positive learning atmosphere. Lastly, through such reading students can improve their reading proficiency as more care is put into this type of activity. Pronunciation, tone and pitch will improve over time. A culture of reading will be revived especially in this day and age competing with technology. Thus, chances are their writing will also improve; creativity is awakened as well as building their general knowledge. For instance, language learning strategy that can be useful in the classroom is by including phonic approach, look-say reading, chorus reading, shared reading activities in class, introducing a reader’s theatre, sustained silent reading sessions and above all the ability to choose the right text in the class where the learners learning a second language enjoys reading and do not see it as a burden.

Figure 2: Language learning Strategy- Reading Approach

Total Physical Response

Another important method that can be of benefit while teaching the development of second language in Fiji classrooms is the Total Physical Response (TPR). Total Physical Response is a method of teaching language using physical movement to react to verbal input in order to lessen student inhibitions and lower their affective filter. It further allows students to respond to language without thinking too much, facilitates long term retention, and reduces student anxiety and stress. In order to implement TPR effectively, it is necessary to plan regular sessions that
progress in a logical order, and to keep several principles in mind. It assists students to improve their English learning in the classroom by allowing students to react to what has been said. Asher cited in the *LLC 413 Reading Brick* (2014: 7) first introduced this and it is suitable to all types of learners (beginners, basic and proficient) in any age group. Apart from that, listening skills are enhanced in this approach too. The TPR Verb Game is a great example of how teachers can effectively promote Second Language Development. In this case students are given instructions relating to verbs to carry out and as a result this helps in recall of what the verb means. On the flip-side, the challenge though will be in class control. Therefore, it is in the hands of the facilitator and the cooperation of one’s students for this approach to work.

Furthermore, Total Physical Response (TPR) is based on the theory that the memory is enhanced through association with physical movement. It is also closely associated with theories of mother tongue language acquisition in very young children, where they respond physically to parental commands, such as "Pick it up" and "Put it down". TPR as an approach to teaching a second language is based, first and foremost, on listening and this is linked to physical actions which are designed to reinforce comprehension of particular basic items. A typical TPR activity might contain instructions such as "Walk to the door", "Open the door", "Sit down" and "Give Maria your dictionary". The students are required to carry out the instructions by physically performing the activities. Given a supportive classroom environment, there is little doubt that such activities can be both motivating and fun, and it is also likely that with even a fairly limited amount of repetition basic instructions such as these could be assimilated by the learners, even if they were unable to reproduce them accurately themselves.

**Communicative Language Teaching Approach**

Furthermore, is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) or otherwise also known as the counseling-learning method. This method involves many classroom activities where ESL/EFL learners are taken through the learning process of problem solving tasks. As a result of this, participation and interaction is encouraged to better prepare the learner to be independent and confident in the language. Curran (ibid. 4) argues that: ‘learning a language is not viewed necessarily as an individual accomplishment but rather as a collective experience, something to be disseminated to the community at large at a later stage in the second language acquisition process.’

The emphasis is on the language syllabus, fluency and accuracy. Students who are taught a second language using this method are able to gauge registers and styles in terms of situation and participants as Enright and McCloskey (1985: 444) claims. Teachers in communicative classrooms involve children in every way they can. Hence, this again is an alternative that ESL/EFL facilitators might like to consider.
Figure 3: Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Facilitator’s role

According to Schuman (1986, cited in McLaughlin, 1987; Ellis, 1994) “the difference of the contexts of first and second language acquisition play an imperative role in the acquisition process. While it is possible to learn a second language in various contexts, first language acquisition takes place only in a natural context and in the social group the child is growing up and where the child gets L1 input only. The different contexts for second language acquisition can also lead to variations in second language proficiency due to affective factors.” Schuman (1986, cited in McLaughlin, 1987; Ellis, 1994) has put forward the Acculturation Theory to account for second language acquisition development in natural settings. He defines acculturation as the process of becoming adapted to a new culture and his claim is that contact with the target language and culture is crucial. The process of acculturation requires both social and psychological adaptation. Learning the appropriate linguistic habits to function within the target language group is one part of this process. Acculturation is determined by the degree of social and psychological ‘distance’ between the learner and the target-language culture. According to this hypothesis, the greater contact with L2 speakers and culture takes place the more acquisition occurs.

On the other hand, teacher qualification is just as crucial to ensure the promotion of Second Language Development. Teaching is looked upon as a science, a technology, a craft, or an art (Freeman and Richards 1993, p.194). Currently in Fiji, our tertiary institutions that offer courses for English teachers show an imbalance in the number of courses/units that need to be taken for Language and Literature. Secondary school teachers in Fiji must specialize in two teaching subjects and Language and Literature are viewed as one. This is where the problem begins as there is insufficient training on content and methodology as Maharaj (ibid.) questions, “…who’s teaching English and how much of it?” Teachers in this subject area should be subjected to mandatory English Proficiency tests similar to those done in Singapore and Britain, the latter an L1 English speaking country. Thus, for the approaches to be implemented, teacher qualification must be right so that we have teachers of English as well as teachers who can teach in English.
The instructors’ role is more than that of facilitating the learning process. The instructor needs to be aware of the needs of teaching in a diverse nation as Fiji. The county is a pluralistic nation. The linguistic landscape demands language facilitators to be sensitive to the needs of their learners. The classroom environment should be one that allows for constructive learning of the second language.

Furthermore, teacher attitude and preparation are key to promoting SLD. Activities need to incorporate visuals that involve students. Not only that but these activities need to vary targeting listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. For structure these activities can be taught under themes to aid students understanding for them to make the connection with what is learnt to their own realities. Incorporate role play, music, story-telling and reader’s theatre to arouse interest in learning language. Facilitators should use the mother-tongue where necessary code switching to help EFL/ESL learners. Involving the community and collaborating with other teachers is just as important to promote second language. Instruction should be clear and feedback for learners to assess where they are at. Teachers do not have to be rigid in the use of textbooks but to be selective and creative in what they choose to use. Our Link and Targets are great examples of frequently used texts that teachers often resort to. We need to create more textbooks using the first language as well as English something similar to what Korea has.

In addition, the curriculum needs re-examining and this involves the Ministry of Education (MoE) as well as the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). The problem here is that this body of authority fails to recognize the need to separate the two components of English – Literature and Language. Not only is this, but the relevance of TESOL is non-existent in Fiji. It is hoped that with the changes suggested for 2015 by the current Minister for Education that things will continue to improve. Griffin (2014: 19) in his article agrees with Dr. Nabalarua who blames curriculum developers for the poor outcomes relating to English.

Overall, one goal of introducing language other than one’s mother-tongue is to prepare our learners to be ‘global citizens’. Failure to promote second language development is a risk that has drastic repercussions on the community and economy. Policy makers, the ministry and all stakeholders need to collaborate so that second languages like English, French or Chinese exist especially in a plural society like ours. The four language approaches have their pros and cons that there is still no one method that truly is perfect. Unless, teachers are given the proper training required then only can these approaches be used to get the maximum required outputs that will improve literacy in Fiji.

Conclusion
L1 and L2 acquisition are intricate processes. To fully comprehend these processes will enable the language facilitator to be more sensitive to the factors involved. Though L1 and L2 acquisition reveal some similarities, they also depict dissimilarities. The role of the facilitator needs to be strengthen so that he/she understands that the phenomena in L1 and L2 acquisition are interrelated, none of them being solely descriptive. Hence, the facilitator is now tasked with the responsibility of using varied teaching aids in their classroom rather than just a single claim or factor involved in language acquisition. They should rather understand, analyze, synthesize and even criticize before trying to implement any of the suggestions made for teaching. It is equally imperative to note that research as tried to make a distinction between “learning” and
“acquisition”. Especially in L2 education, the terms “learning” and “acquisition” are very often used interchangeably. The arguments considering L1 and L2 acquisition are inconclusive and that's why many studies were conducted to explain the nature of L1 and L2 acquisition. L1 and L2 acquisition are affected by many variables. Thus, the student's profile itself is an important determiner at the decision making phase of language teaching. Finally, language teachers should combine their theoretical knowledge with their teaching situation.
References


Kaur, M. 2014, Methods of language teaching: Lecture 1 Power-point slides, University of Fiji, Suva.


