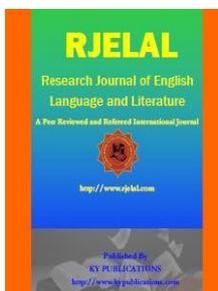




PREDICAMENTS OF RURAL STUDENTS OF ANDHRA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A DAMAGE REPAIR APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

To stand in the global set-up, it is indispensable to speak intelligible English. Rural students in the present scenario are facing difficulties in English language acquisition. It is very essential to have preliminary basics at the school level in order to exhibit their skills at the higher levels. The major predicaments that persist are medium of Instruction in local language (Telugu), social Environment, mother tongue influence, impractical teaching methodology and complexity of English language – structures, syntax and semantics.

The present research project unveils the above said predicaments among rural students. The chosen targeted population for the project is **student community of a social welfare college in Andhra Pradesh**. It is an attempt to provide practical solutions to improve their levels by adopting technological methods. The connotation of this project is for the betterment of the weaker section of the society. The objectives of the project are to study the causes of poor English skills and to describe the regional- demographics of victims. Further, it works on the Damage Repair Approach (DRA) related to language learning such as four macro-options of focus-on-form interventions as mentioned by Ellis (1998), and their theoretical motivations are presented, followed by negative feedback and Performance based Assessments – oral presentations, phonetic awareness & vocabulary. The last section of the paper deals with pedagogical issues of explicit / implicit teaching. The chosen targeted population for the project is student community of a social welfare college – A set of 25 selected girl students from AP Tribal Welfare Junior College for Girls, Mahanandi. It is an attempt to provide practical solutions to improve their levels by adopting technological methods.

Key words: SLA, Macro Options - input processing- input enhancement- negative feedback, explicit / implicit teaching & learning, Damage Repair Approach (DRA)

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INTRODUCTION

English language teaching includes teaching of English as foreign language to the students for the purpose of acquainting them with language skills. It should also enable the students to appreciate the content and analyze it critically. In India, urban

students perform fairly well in terms of communication, but unfortunately rural students display inadequacy of skills. This study is intended to find out various reasons of poor communicative abilities among rural students and suggest corrective measures. The major **predicaments** identified were

medium of instruction in local language (Telugu), social environment, mother tongue influence, impractical teaching methodology and complexity of English language – structures, syntax and semantics.

The connotation of this project is for the betterment of the weaker section of the society. The objectives of the research are to study the causes of poor English skills and to describe the regional-demographics of victims. This exploratory study seeks to uncover the disparity in practice and perception of English competence among rural students of an institute in A.P. The performance was examined from the students' performances. The performance competence was assessed on the basis of responses of participants given in the questionnaires, the participants' evaluations of their own performance. Further, it works on the Damage Repair Approach (DRA) related to language learning. The methodology adopted was based on four macro-options of focus-on-form interventions as mentioned by Ellis (1998), and Performance based Assessments – oral presentations, phonetic awareness & vocabulary to achieve better outcomes.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) came out at a time when teachers were skeptical about the role of grammar in foreign language instruction (Mitchell, 2000) and felt disillusioned with the results of audio-lingual teaching (Lightbown, 2000). But the drastic changes took place in second language teaching in recent times. According to Krashen (1985), in order to acquire a second language all that was needed was comprehensible input and motivation. Lightbown (2000) reports that, in the late eighties 'everybody' believed in comprehensible input and the benefits of group work. The major hypothesis of second language acquisition is that it can't be learned by just following the rules. Lightbown (1985) made the following claims:

- Practice does not make perfect.
- Isolated explicit error correction is usually ineffective in changing language behavior.
- For most adult learners, acquisition stops – "fossilizes" – before the learner has achieved native like mastery of the target language.

- One cannot achieve native like command of a second language in one hour a day.

It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - *natural communication* - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. Based on the above speculations, the current research entails the methodologies of Ellis (1998) as model for improving communicative competence among the learners.

Methodology: Descriptive as well as Empirical study
Research Methodology

The sample of this study consisted of twenty five intermediate students of a social welfare Government Junior College in a remote place - Mahanandi, Kurnool Dt., in the state of A.P. The mean age was 17. The socio-economic background of the participants was below average. With the respect to language exposure, the medium of Instruction is both the regional language i.e, Telugu as well as English. Having identified the predicaments of these target group students, the feasible DRA method has been adopted through **Macro Options** to foster language competency.

The Macro Options

Ellis (1998) identifies four **Macro-Options** to foster noticing or processing of linguistic form: *Processing Input Instruction, Explicit Instruction, Production Practice and Negative Feedback*. These four options, each responding to a theoretical motivation, place the focus-on-form intervention at different points in a computational model of L2 acquisition.

Processing Instruction

In **Processing Instruction**, an option based on a model of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) developed by VanPatten (1995), the pedagogical intervention takes place at the input stage when learners are actively engaged in comprehension. It is suitable for DRA in this region of Andhra, because in processing instruction, the input has been carefully manipulated so that the learners are induced to notice the target grammatical features. As the target students were in the influence of their mother tongue, pedagogical intervention was supportive in acquiring the language. Exerting this control of attention on particular features of grammar during

comprehension, VanPatten and Sanz (1995) argue, is an effective way to maximize form meaning connections in the process of conversion of input to intake.

Other options which operate at the input stage are *Input Flood* and *Input Enhancement*. Input processing constitutes *comprehension-based focused task* (Ellis, 2003). These are designed to obligate learners to process a specific feature in the input, and learners cannot avoid processing them. In contrast to comprehension tasks typical of experiential Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where learners can avoid processing the input syntactically by exclusively relying on semantic processing (Swain, 1985), while focused comprehension tasks require syntactic processing. The learners have been given hand-outs of comprehension tasks and made worked out on them. The input enhancement has been done favorably by the target students by adopting this technique as the focus was on understanding the passage in a syntactic manner.

Explicit Instruction

In *Explicit Instruction*, the pedagogical intervention is intended to impinge on the learners L2 knowledge by deliberately directing them to attend to form. According to DeKeyser's definition (1995), an instructional treatment is explicit if rule explanation forms part of the instruction. In other words, explicit instruction can be delivered under two modes depending on its directness. Direct explicit instruction takes the form of grammatical explanations that can be delivered orally or in writing. Indirect explicit instruction is meant to have learners discover grammatical rules for themselves by carrying out *consciousness-raising task*.

According to Ellis (2003), the rationale for the use of consciousness-raising tasks draws partly on the claim that learning is more significant if it involves greater depth of processing, and partly on the hypothesis that explicit knowledge is a facilitator of the acquisition of implicit knowledge. That is, it is assumed that the explicit declarative knowledge will foster the development of implicit procedural knowledge through intake facilitation. In addition, they provide effective opportunities for learners to communicate. For instance, the young learners have

understood the Tenses by conscious – raising task of News paper article activity. They were asked to work on one article by focusing on grammar aspects. Thus, interlinking the grammar with a context based and conscious – raising task fetched better results.

Production Practice

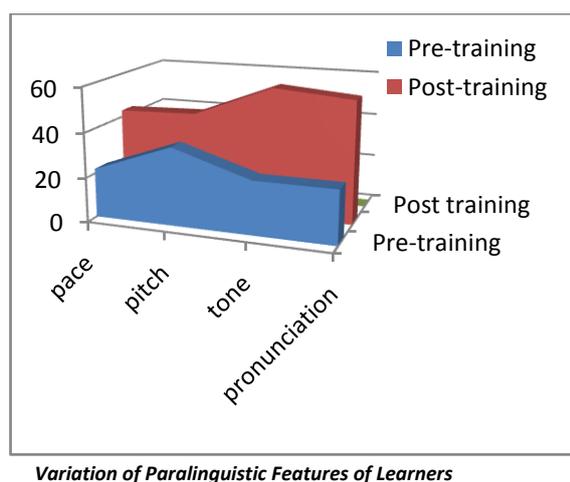
In *Production Practice* the pedagogical intervention takes place at the output stage through tasks that include language production. Tasks specifically designed to bring forth the use of preselected communicative items. The present study draws on this rationale and adopts video – recorded presentations as a tool for self – evaluation of oral presentation in English by the students in A.P. In this Study, the practice of oral presentation is examined on the lines of what makes a good presentation. De Grez, Valcke and Roozen (2009) emphasizes the importance of feedback that can be obtained from videotaped recordings of oral presentations. The oral presentation competence was assessed on the basis of responses of participants during the sessions.

During the activity, a few students could not put into practice of good oral presentation. Some qualitative studies examined the challenges experienced by ESL students during oral activities in higher education (Weissberg, 1993; Morita, 2000; Zappa – Hollman, 2007). These studies showed that oral presentation was a challenge for ESL students. Most of them were unaware of what needs to be done to improve their oral presentation skills (Nakamara, 2002). Self evaluation is defined as the self judgment of oral speech by the student (Boud, 2013). Students often encounter the task of doing an oral presentation by practically making a presentation without any knowledge of what makes a good oral presentation. Research shows that oral presentation skills can be improved by receiving feedback from recorded presentations through self-evaluation (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992; Brown, Quigley, 1998; Grieson & Lowe, 2000; Rosenstein, 2002). However, the study limits itself to a few competencies involved in making a good oral presentation. They include paralinguistic features of speech and non verbal behavior of the speaker which enables to connect with the audience.

A widely researched topic on speech has different connotations leading to a lack of clarity and conciseness. The present study considers Crystal's (1974) explanation of paralinguistic features by restricting the scope to 'vocal' includes paralinguistic features such as pace, pitch, pronunciation. Similarly, the pitch of the voice is taken into consideration for the meaningfulness of the text and not for the emotional content of the message involved in paralinguage.

Data from the three different sources including video recording of the oral presentations, students' responses to the questionnaires, and students' evaluations were analyzed separately to seek answer answers to the research questions.

Fig. 1



The findings of this study point to a gap between perception and practice of oral presentation with this group of students of A.P. With reference to paralinguistic features the findings show that certain competencies like pace, tone and pitch were not difficult to understand for the students. The pace level was 23% where as it was 43%, after training. Likewise pitch was 35% previously and it gained 9% after training and tone aspects are highly encouraging in post training phase as there was wide growth of 34% in their performance.

Similarly pronunciation aspects have been displayed in a brilliant manner by taking the leap up to 55%.

The students showed betterment in pronunciation and tone or voice modulation after the specific pedagogical training. This conclusion is in conformity with that made in other studies (Weissberg, 1993; Mortia, 2000; Zappa–Hollman, 2007) and implies that explicit teaching of these features should be accompanied by conscious practice in oral communication with learners of English as a foreign / second language.

Phonetic Upgrading

A generally accepted goal of pronunciation pedagogy is to help learners achieve a comfortably intelligible pronunciation rather than a native-like one. It was undertaken in the language lab with software assisted pronunciation materials. As Munro, M. J. (2011) rightly pointed out, "Intelligibility is a fundamental requirement in human interaction, while the costs of *unintelligibility* range from minor inconvenience to matters of life or death." In second language (L2) classrooms, it is not expected to encounter life and death situations. Apart from the personal frustration they may feel, communication difficulties can damage educational and career opportunities.

In view of this grave situation, phonetics orientation has taken up for the target students. In the practice session, words were given to all groups to pronounce with phonetic approach. The pronunciation was practiced with analyzing graphical method. Simple words with an emphasis on vowel, diphthongs, and consonants were assigned, for example, *air, pin, cup, box, copy, coffee, bank* etc., to pronounce.

They used spectrograms of their own speech to compare their production to the prerecorded spectrograms. The methodology proposed in the study is put forth as a model for other pedagogical interventions based on the reactions of both teachers and students. Students repeated this process and recognized the Received Pronunciation (R.P).

Table 1

S.No	Phoneme	WORD	NS	NNS
1	Vowel	Horse	/hɔ:s/	/ha:s/
		Earth	/ə:θ/	/æ'rθ /
		Box	/bɔks/	/ba:ks/
2	Diphthongs	Open	/əʊpən /	/ɔ:pen/
		Gate	/geit/	/gæt/
		Tour	/tʊə'/	/tu:r/
3	Consonants	Vision	/vɪʒ.ən/	/vɪdʒn/
		Prize	/praɪz/	/praɪs/
		Sure	/ʃʊə'/	/su:r/

*Pronunciation variations of rural students of A.P.
 Identifying difference in Pronunciation through DRA*

The research is about damage repair, the measures have been taken for improvement. The above table reveals the phonetic variation of rural students of A.P. They faced difficulty in pronouncing vowels /ɔ:/, /ə:/ and are replaced with /a:/. The diphthongs are also not acquired and substituted with a vowel as shown in the table. Similarly, certain consonants /z/, /ʒ/ are not acquired originally. It was identified that the mother tongue influence was on their English pronunciation, when they pronounced the word “bank” like ‘banku’ with native accent, the ‘KU’ sound not obtainable in English Language. The variation in the pronunciation was observed when they heard the real pronunciation through software. A special training was provided with specific practice on mispronounced sounds. By computer –assisted learning and worksheets they became aware of the phonetics.

Negative Feedback

Positive feedback e.g., *Here's what you did really well...* increases *commitment* to the work you do, by enhancing both your experience and your confidence. Negative feedback is corrective in the sense. E.g., *Here's where you went wrong.* On the other hand, it is *informative* — need to spend effort, and offers insight into how to improve. (Heidi Grant Halvorson, HBR, Jan, 28, 2013). When feedback informs people about their rate of progress, it provides information about the rate of progress relative to expectations (Carver and Scheier 1998; Higgins 1987). In this instance, negative feedback

increases motivation because it signals insufficient progress. For example, a student who wishes to motivate herself to study for an exam would seek positive feedback if she wants to increase her commitment to encourage herself to progress at a more sufficient pace, negative feedback can be a good source.

The findings also provide evidence that feedback can help bridge the gap between practice and perception. As shown by other studies (Brown, Bull & Pendlebury, 1997; Greivson & Lowe, 2000), this study also provides evidence that feedback in the form of watching one's own video – recorded performance helps to show the disparity between practice and perception. It is to be noted, however, that purely communicative methodology has had only marginal impact on foreign language teaching settings, where the dominant pedagogy continues to involve a structural syllabus or, even, grammar translation (Skehan, 1998).

Need of Further Research

In sum, it is clear from this review that DRA has been and continues to be a productive area of research in SLA. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go in order to sort out contradictory findings across studies. This is especially true for enhanced input and negative feedback where

some studies have shown that these instructional interventions were insufficient. Probably a number of variables should be taken into account in future research such as its salience and complexity, as well as individual differences and the types of instruction, among others. Future research also needs to continue in the study of how LRE's vary as a result of the type of task and the participants both in focused and unfocused tasks.

Conclusion

As seen in this paper, the influence of SLA theory and research on language teaching proposals continues to be strong. It became evident exposure alone is not sufficient but emphasis should be laid on meaningful input and exposure to enable rural learners of A.P. to acquire the language. As a result, an increasing number of activities in communicative contexts have been tested on them to gain

productive results. Hence, it is to be expected that the theoretical bases and research evidences such as DRA will provide teachers with insights that are relevant to their own teaching situations. However, the teachers may be provided with an understanding of the need for incorporating suitable methodology along with purely communicative methodology.

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Web Resource

<https://hbr.org/2013/01/sometimes-negative-feedback-is/>