Overcoming age-related differences

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One of the most controversial issues in FL teaching is the age at which language learning should start. Nowadays it is recognized that in second language contexts maturational constraints make an early start advisable, but there is still disagreement regarding the problem of when to start or the best way to learn in foreign contexts. The aim of this paper is threefold: to establish if there is a critical or sensitive period for FL learners; to determine the particular linguistic and cognitive aspects affected by this period; and to make a pedagogical proposal to overcome the age-related problem using an extract taken from the film Shrek. *This proposal comprises two lesson plans using the same film extract, one for children and the other one for older students. These plans are then compared in terms of the different cognitive, linguistic, and metalinguistic processes involved in learning and teaching for each age range.*

Introduction

One of the most controversial issues in foreign language teaching contexts[1] is the age at which learning another language should start. Even though nowadays research into maturational constraints conducted within second (not foreign) language contexts make it advisable to start early, there are still disagreements concerning the cause of those constraints and the particular contexts where they apply.

Acknowledging the existence of a period after which language learning becomes more difficult, particularly in foreign contexts, involves important political, economical, and educational changes. Political decisions include the creation of laws establishing the age of introduction of a foreign language, which in turn have a direct effect on educational policies. In fact the last two educational reforms in Spain have changed the starting age for learning L2: with the LOGSE (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, 1990) it was eight years old and optionally younger, whereas with the LOCE (Ley Orgánica de Calidad de Enseñanza, 2002) it is six years old and possibly younger. This entails the provision of economic resources for materials, personnel, and reorganization of university curricula for prospective primary teachers, who have to be ready to teach children at the age laid down by the law.

But in fact, there is still serious disagreement regarding the problem of when to start or the best way to learn in foreign contexts, because results from second language environments have been directly generalized to a completely different situation (Muñoz *et al.* 2003). That is to say, not

Collaborative EFL teaching in primary schools

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This paper discusses an innovative programme of collaborative EFL teaching in Hong Kong primary schools, involving team-teaching shared between imported native-speaking English teachers and their local counterparts. First it analyses the way in which the scheme has evolved from previous experiences. The paper then draws on an open-ended questionnaire survey, email and face to face interviews, and classroom observations of team-teaching in action. It focuses on findings related to the three main objectives of the scheme: impact on pupils, innovative teaching, and professional development. More positive outcomes were reported for the first issue than the other two. Some implications for collaboration and the deployment of native-speaking English teachers are discussed.

Introduction

In contemporary ELT, it is common for countries to import native-speaking English teachers (NETs) to supplement or even to replace local English teachers (LETs). Neither native-speakers nor non-native speakers are inherently superior to the other (Medgyes 1992), but they possess potentially complementary attributes. NETs bring a number of advantages, most obviously their facility in English and their ability to create a genuine need for students to communicate through the target language. Some of the NET disadvantages are lack of familiarity with learner or context, and that they are often ill-equipped to communicate well through the students' mother tongue. As illustrated by Medgyes (op. cit.), LET capacities are mainly the converse of these, for example: LETs know local learners, syllabi, and exam systems well. Key issues in schemes whereby NETs are imported include the need for NETs to familiarize themselves with local conditions and the maintenance of the self-esteem of LETs. A strategy for tackling these two issues is for NETs and LETs to work together in the classroom as a means of enhancing mutual understanding and exploiting respective strengths.

Generally, NETs have not been widely deployed in primary school EFL, presumably on the grounds that the limited language resources of the young learner may render communication difficult. This paper questions this assumption through a discussion of innovative programmes of collaboration between NETs and LETs in Hong Kong. The aims of the paper are to demonstrate that NETs can be usefully deployed in primary schools

The Key Is in the Keyword: L2 Vocabulary Learning Methods With Beginning Learners of Spanish

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This study investigates the effectiveness of three methods of learning vocabulary among 778 beginning second language (L2) learners. Rote memorization consists of memorizing the first language (L1) translation of a new L2 word by rehearsal. Semantic mapping displays L1 words conceptually related to the L2 word in a diagram. The keyword method involves associating the novel L2 word with an L1 keyword that is acoustically or orthographically similar, and then connecting the L1 keyword with the L1 translation of the L2 word. The results reveal that vocabulary learning techniques requiring deeper processing through form and meaning associations (i.e., the keyword method) yield the best retention. In addition, rote memorization of L1–L2 equivalents is more effective than creating multiple meaning associations (i.e., semantic mapping). We suggest that using the keyword method with phonological keywords and direct L1 keyword-translation links in the classroom leads to better L2 vocabulary learning at early stages of acquisition.

COGNITIVE MODELS OF LEXICAL PROCESS-ing and storage have provided the impetus for developing a number of teaching methods that have sought to aid the retention of new words by increasing depth of processing. Depth of processing refers to the level at which stimuli are cognitively processed, and it can be enhanced by increasing the processing of new words and facilitating their integration into the learner's previous knowledge (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). In both first language (L1) studies (see Au & Glusman, 1990; Pressley, Levin, & McCormick, 1980, for a review) and second language (L2) studies (see de Groot & Van Hell, 2005, for a review), vocabulary memorization strategies requiring deeper processing have been found to result in better retention of words than strategies involving shallower processing. However, L2 learners favor strategies that require minimum depth of processing, unless instructed otherwise. This preference exists

because the capacity to process and store incoming information is limited (Baddeley, 2003; Just & Carpenter, 1992), and the acquisition of an L2 during adulthood imposes additional processing load on cognitive resources. There is now mounting evidence corroborating infrequent spontaneous usage of more complex strategies such as imagery, inferencing, and the keyword method by less proficient L2 learners (Cohen & Aphek, 1981; Meara, 1982; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo, 1985; for a review, see Nielsen, 2001; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

One way of enabling deeper processing at early stages of acquisition is to teach L2 learners how to engage in complex strategies of lexical processing. Research that investigates the role that instruction plays on the acquisition of L2 vocabulary suggests that instruction channeling the resources available to learners yields better retention than unstructured learning, that is, when learners use strategies of their choice (Sanoui, 1992, 1995; but see Kojic-Sabo & Lightbown, 1999). However, previous studies contain methodological pitfalls that

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Audiolingual Method and Behaviorism: From Misunderstanding to Myth

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This article contends that the modern descendant of B. F. Skinner's experimental analysis of behavior, 'behavior analysis,' and as well his 1957 masterwork *Verbal Behavior*, have rarely if ever been seriously contemplated by applied linguists for possible contributions to the field. Rather, a pat literature of dismissal has developed that justifies itself on (a) a fictitious link between the audiolingual method and undifferentiated behaviorism, and/or (b) a demonstrably erroneous notion that operant psychology is too simplistic to effectively take up language issues. In reality, behavior analysis is alive, well, and making significant contributions in applied language settings, but *not* typically in the second language area.

Behaviorism is simply defined in the dictionary as 'a theory and method of psychological investigation based on the objective study of behavior' (Onions 1973: 176). However simple the definition may be, the term has stimulated instances of critique, misapprehension, and false impressions within the field of second language teaching and learning that are nothing short of legion. This is remarkable because so few behavior analysts have ever contributed research to or even expressed a serious interest in second language learning. Until relatively recently, no generally known second language method of instruction or classroom procedure or practice can be argued to have arisen from the operant behaviorist camp, or be said to be clearly congruent with any commonly known practice or procedure of behaviour analysis.

Nonetheless, two major strands of criticism have accrued in our field, frequently, but not always simultaneously held, and bountiful in the literature. First, regarding practice, there is a misleading presumption that behavioral psychology underlies the routines of second language teaching and learning gathered under the rubric of the audiolingual method, a grouping of classroom, language laboratory, and textbook formulae and drills disparaged in current second language pedagogical fashion. Second, concerning explanatory power, there is a commonly accepted notion that an undifferentiated behaviorism, rooted in methodological behaviorism or 'S-R' psychology' (cf. Leigland 1989: 27) is so simplistic as to be inadequate

The Effects of Listening Support on the Listening Performance of EFL Learners

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Listening comprehension is a difficult skill for foreign language learners to develop and for their teachers to assess. In designing suitable listening tests, teachers can provide various forms of support to reduce the demands of the task for the test takers. This study investigated the effects of four types of listening support: previewing the test questions, repetition of the input, providing background knowledge about the topic, and vocabulary instruction. The research involved a classroom-based experiment with 160 students enrolled in a required English listening course at a college in Taiwan. The results showed that the most effective type of support overall was providing information about the topic, followed by repetition of the input. The learners' level of listening proficiency had a significant interaction effect, particularly in the case of question preview. Vocabulary instruction was the least useful form of support, regardless of proficiency level. The findings are generally consistent with the results of the small number of previous studies in this area but there is certainly scope for further investigation.

Students of English in a foreign language environment have difficulty comprehending the spoken language, especially in one-way listening situations where they do not have the opportunity to see—let alone interact with—the speaker. One such situation that poses particular challenges is taking a listening test with audiotaped input. Difficulties are created by the students' limited knowledge of the language system and their lack of experience hearing fluent natural speech in the target language. In addition, the test takers are usually not informed of the test topics in advance, they typically hear the input only once, and they may not receive supporting information in visual form, apart from the