

Psycholinguistic Techniques in Measuring Productive Language Skills

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the main techniques of psycholinguistics in teaching languages. Psycholinguistics is the study of the mental aspects of language and speech. It is primarily concerned with the ways in which language is represented and processed in the brain. A branch of both linguistics and psychology, psycholinguistics is part of the field of cognitive science. The research work covers effective method in improving productive language skills within literature review and special principles of psychology.

KEYWORD: psycholinguistics, speech, language skills, production, perception.

Introduction. The term *psycholinguistics* was introduced by American psychologist Jacob Robert Kantor in his 1936 book, "An Objective Psychology of Grammar." The term was popularized by one of Kantor's students, Nicholas Henry Pronko, in a 1946 article "Language and Psycholinguistics: A Review."

The field of psycholinguistics has made impressive advances within the last twenty years in terms of developing methods to assess different modalities (comprehension, production) and levels of language representation (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) separately from each other, as well as separating implicit from explicit knowledge of language in assessment.

Literature review. Second language teachers and research students can use this knowledge and methods to develop their own assessments and evaluate their students' learning in a classroom setting throughout the year. This can enable them to tailor teaching and learning on the basis of student progress and provide additional activities or move faster in the syllabus when they see that students have internalised specific rules and properties of the language. A large range of production tasks has been developed within the psycholinguistic tradition that are at the disposal of language teachers and research students, for example, elicited imitation, elicited production, narrative tasks, and syntactic priming tasks, to mention just a few. These tasks have advantages and disadvantages as each one assesses language production in a slightly different way, has specific task demands and may be best suited for specific learner groups depending on the area to be assessed, the age, and the proficiency level of the learners. Due to space limitations, this chapter will introduce and discuss two of these tasks, elicited imitation and syntactic priming. See other chapters in this volume, such as Kahoul et al. , Rogers et al. and Mora and Safronova, for illustrations of other tasks which are also used in collecting data for studies of second language acquisition.

Methods. Elicited Imitation (EI) or Sentence Repetition has a long tradition in first and second language acquisition research and has often been used by researchers to measure language

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proficiency in a foreign language teaching setting, although rarely as a formal assessment (for second language acquisition, see e.g. Lust, Flynn & Foley, 1996; Jessop et al., 2007; Bley-Vroman & Chaudron, 1994). At the heart of EI tasks is the innate human capacity (and spontaneous tendency) to imitate behaviour in our environment, including language, for example sounds, words, and sentences. The rationale behind using EI tasks to measure language proficiency is that, although imitating someone else's behaviour is a spontaneous capacity, it is very hard to imitate sentences accurately if the structures in the sentence are not part of one's grammatical system. This is because to imitate a sentence, participants have to be able to analyse it at all levels of representation (phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic), extract its meaning, store it temporarily in short term memory and then use the production system to repeat it.

Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. This fact related to the crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006:58-74) mention some factors affecting language learning. a. Intelligence The term 'intelligence' has traditionally been used to refer to performance on certain kinds of tests. These tests are often associated with success in school, and a link between intelligence and second language learning has sometimes been reported. b. Aptitude Specific abilities thought to predict success in language learning have been studied under the title of language learning 'aptitude'. Research has characterized aptitude in terms of the ability to learn quickly. Thus, we may hypothesize that a learner with high aptitude may learn with greater ease and speed but those other learners may also be successful if they persevere. c. Learning Style The term 'learning style' has been used to describe an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills. Some people say that they cannot learn something until they have seen it. Such learners would fall into the group called 'visual' learners. Other people, who may be called 'aural' learners, seem to learn best 'by ear'. For others, referred to as 'kinesthetic' learners, a physical action such as miming or role-play seems to help the learning process. These are referred to as perceptually-based learning styles. d. Personality A number of personality characteristics have been proposed as likely to affect second language learning. It is often argued that an extroverted person is well suited to language learning. Another aspect of personality that has been studied is inhibition. It has been suggested that inhibition discourages risk-taking, which is necessary for progress in language learning. Furthermore, learner anxiety-feelings of worry, nervousness, and stress that many students experience when learning a second language- has been extensively investigated. Recent research investigating learner anxiety in second language classrooms acknowledges that anxiety is more likely to be dynamic and dependent on particular situations and circumstances. Several other personality characteristics such as self-esteem, empathy, dominance, talkativeness, and responsiveness have also been studied. However, it has been not easy to empirically demonstrate the effect of personality in language learning.

Psycholinguistic approach has a workable control over the field of teaching speaking as a skill. It has specified several difficulties on speaking such as students' oriented difficulty. Psycholinguistics also explains that personality, like introvert and extrovert students, affects students' performance in language learning. Speaking defects like voice disorders, stuttering, and disarticulation are also psychological in origin caused by personality factor. There are also some traumatic disorders such as aphasia and autism caused by localized in damage. It is recommend therapies and counseling practices for such difficulties. Thus, the investigations of psycholinguistic approach have provided solutions for almost each type of language learning difficulty. With the knowledge, teachers can apply the appropriate techniques to teach speaking skills by considering the condition of the learner and find interesting topics to be discussed in speaking class.

Psycholinguistics helps in understanding the students' mistakes in writing. It has a clear contribution on spelling mistakes since in English words are not spelled as they sound. There is a hardship on this case because storing of the spelling of words and retrieve them on demand is very difficult. Psycholinguistics approach indicates that there are mistakes in writing caused by agraphia, which must be treated properly. Psycholinguistics helps to find interesting topic to write. It serves to decrease the level of the difficulties in writing. It helps to specify the writing levels and writing types. It pins down the mechanic mistakes on punctuation and suggests certain cures for them.

To conclude, language learning is type of ability that required special skill and temper from the learners and educators. Psycholinguistics deals with not only psychological teaching approach but also effective techniques in obtaining productive skills.

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