UNIT 25 ENHANCING PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS – Part I

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to raise awareness about what the teacher of L2 should be looking for when s/he is thinking about enhancing learners’ performance in English. Some of the factors they should be acquainted with are:

- the basic difference between competence and performance,
- psychological aspects which affect learning,
- differential abilities due to multiple intelligence,
- the role of errors in language learning.

These factors will help teachers analyse their own teaching as well as understand the learner, and thus help learner performance.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

As teachers there is a lot of pressure on us to enhance our learners’ performance. Parents, Principal, authorities and above all our own conscience compels us to improve each child’s performance and get the best out of each of them. However, in order to do so, we need to be aware of several aspects of a child, i.e., the way a child learns – specifically how a language is acquired, whether an L1 or L2, why does a child make errors, especially in L2? Are errors aberrations to be totally condemned or are they a step in the process of learning? In the course of this unit we intend to look at (i) the major learning theories of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on language learning (ii) understanding of each child’s learning style due to multiple
intelligence and (ii) finally the role of errors in language learning. All these factors will help you understand each learner and thus enhance his/her performance.

### 25.2 PERFORMANCE versus COMPETENCE

For a language teacher, it is essential to understand the terms 'competence' and 'performance'. According to the American linguist, Noam Chomsky, **competence** is the native speaker's ideal knowledge of his/her language, the mastery of the system of rules. On the other hand, according to Chomsky, **performance** is the production of actual sentences used in real-life situations. As per this concept, a native learner's knowledge of the structure of the language is his/her Linguistic Competence, and the way in which he/she uses it is the Linguistic Performance. While competence is a set of principles that a learner masters, performance is what a learner does. The former is a kind of code; the latter is the act of encoding or decoding. In other words, the abstract or the internal grammar that enables a speaker to utter and understand an infinite number of potential utterances is a speaker's competence. Competence is free from interference due to slips of memory, lapses of attention etc., while performance reflects many such lapses. Therefore competence is ideal, whereas performance may have several deviances.

Since Chomsky refers to the ideal native speaker's 'competence', it is not so much our concern in this unit. However, L2 learners internalize the rules of the second language systematically albeit variably. There could be several reasons for this, which we will discuss later on. The learners' performance will therefore also be differential. With this understanding of the concept of performance, let us read a little more about the factors that contribute to the varied performance of the learners who have multiple intelligence. Such factors as given below can also be useful in evolving classroom strategies to enhance learners' performance.

**Check Your Progress** = 1

1) What is Chomsky's notion of Performance and Competence?

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### 25.3 HOW DOES A CHILD LEARN?

The propounders and supporters of **behaviourists**, mentalists and developmental interactionists give varied explanation of modes of learning.

#### 25.3.1 The Behaviourist Learning Theory

We have already discussed in brief the Behaviourist - Structuralist notion of learning in Blocks 1 and 2. Please read that portion again. We, however, revise the Behaviourist model of learning and specifically language learning again, primarily using the viewpoint of the American psychologist Skinner. From the observation, systematization and prediction of animal responses to stimuli in laboratory experiments, Skinner drew certain conclusions about human behaviour. To Skinner a theory of language learning should be derived from a general **behaviourist** learning theory.

In the case of language, **behaviourism** implies that a speaker's performance or his/her responses can be traced back to specific stimulus-response relationships. Thus, in a
simple behaviourist theory, each utterance follows on some sort of verbal or non-verbal stimulus which exists in the environment, and further, it will be reinforced by the behaviour of others. In fact, according to Skinner, language behaviour could only be studied through observation of the world around the language user; that is, through observation of external factors. One important external factor in the language learning process is the frequency with which a certain utterance is used in the child's environment. In the behaviourists' view, children imitate the language of their environment to a considerable degree, and imitation is a strong contributing factor in the language learning process. Therefore, the frequency with which words and structures occur in the language of the environment, will influence the language development of the child. In addition reinforcement is also required to acquire higher degree of language proficiency. The reinforcement or reward could be due to parental approval, or the approval of other people in the environment.

For Skinner, verbal behaviour is only one part of the general universally employed learning process. Since he does not differentiate between language behaviour and other forms of behaviour, it implies, therefore, that for him language is not species-specific.

25.3.2 The Mentalist/Cognitivist Approach

Chomsky (1959), in an extensive discussion of Skinner's (1957) Verbal Behaviour, attacked the behaviourist ideas of language learning. Chomsky argued that human behaviour is much more complex than animal behaviour. Moreover, human language behaviour is too complex to be explained through animal behaviour. Chomsky argued that a description of language behaviour cannot be merely a matter of stimulus and response, but of the innate ability of the human beings to learn language. He puts forward the notion of a Language Acquisition Device or LAD that enables the child to make hypotheses about the structure of language in general, and about the structure of language he/she is learning in particular. This is not a conscious process but a subconscious one. The hypotheses that the child subconsciously sets up are tested in its use of language, and matched with the new linguistic input that it receives by listening to what is said in its immediate environment. Therefore, a child's language constantly changes as it develops its rule system, until it/the develops adult-like proficiency.

This view of the language learning process, lays stress on the cognitive activities of the language learner, and minimizes the importance of such external factors as imitation, frequency of stimulus, reinforcement.

25.3.3 The Procedural Approach

However, in the more recent Procedural Approach, the interaction between internal and external factors is cited as central to language development. The starting point, which remains a mentalistic one, is the child's cognitive capacity to discover structure in the language that is spoken around him/her. Both the child's comprehension and production of language are based on a continuously expanding, changing and adapting system of discovery procedures.

The procedural approach can be represented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>input</th>
<th>internal mechanism</th>
<th>output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(child's primary linguistic data)</td>
<td>cognitive organizer</td>
<td>(child's language behaviour)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig.1: The input/output system in language development*

In order to explain the output of the child, two questions have to be dealt with:
i. What is the structure and function of the input that the child receives?

ii. What does the child's cognitive organisation consist of, that it causes these differences between input and output?

i. The Structure of the Child’s Linguistic Input

In the mentalist approach to language learning it was believed, that the linguistic input that a child received was completely unstructured. There was no difference between what was said to children and what was said to adults.

However, recent studies (after 1970) have shown that there are considerable differences between the way adults speak to children, and the way they speak to each other. Adult-child speech is much more 'structured' and 'simple' than adult-adult speech. De Villiers and De Villiers (1978:194-5) summarize the differences between adult-child as follows. We give below the syntactic differences:

**| Difference | Observations about language use with children |
---|---|---|
**Syntax** | Shorter and less varied utterance length. |
| | Sentences mostly well-formed and intelligible. |
| | Many partial/complete repetitions of own or child’s utterances, sometimes with expansion. |
| | Fewer broken sentences. |
| | Fewer verbs per utterance, fewer coordinate or subordinate clauses, fewer embeddings. |
| | More content words and fewer function words. |
| | Subject nouns or pronouns and auxiliary in yes/no questions often deleted. |
| | More imperatives and questions to young children. |
| | Increasing number of declaratives with increasing age of child. |

ii. The Child’s Cognitive Organisation of Language

There are as yet no detailed models for the description of children’s cognitive organisation of language. However, Slobin (1973) on the basis of data from a large number of unrelated languages, formulated a number of 'operating principles' for child language acquisition. Clark and Clark (1977:339-42) have recorded and reformulated these operating principles. We have listed a modified form of some of these operating principles:

i. Children look for systematic modifications in the forms of words.

This principles helps children to grasp the fact that word stems may be slightly modified to express important differences in meaning. Example,

*preach, preacher*
*monkey, monkeys, monkey's banana*

ii. Children will look for overt cues for underlying meaning

For instance, children will use
iii. Children avoid exceptions to the rule

Children tend to use the regular rule for even the irregular/special cases.

Example:  *baked* for *broke*  
*Good* for *went*

iv. Children pay attention to the order of words, prefixes and suffixes

This principle helps children to keep track of the order of elements within words, and the order of words within sentences. Children learning English, rarely, if ever, make mistakes like *ex fish, ed play, toy the*.

25.3.4 The Developmental Interaction Approach

Language for the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, as mentioned in his Developmental Interaction Approach, is neither innate nor learned, but the result of cognitive maturation. The complex structures of language emerge as a result of the continuing interaction between the child's current level of cognitive functioning and his/her current linguistic and non-linguistic environment. Piaget compares intellectual development to embryological development — just as in embryology, interaction results in the growth and the increased complexity of the body organs and functions, so also as the child continues to cope with his/her environment, his/her mental processes become more and more complex. Piaget divides the interaction between the child and his/her environment into two phases:

a. assimilation: When s/he takes in something from the environment, where the environment acts as the stimulus and the child responds with the responses s/he has already acquired.

But this is not sufficient — the child needs to cope with a changing and constantly expanding environment as s/he grows into an adult. This coping involves reorganizing of his/her thinking to develop new patterns of responses which Piaget calls schemata. In effect the child must change old into new schemata.

b. accommodation: this defines the process of reorganizing schemata in ways that allow the child to cope more fully with his/her environment. The process of reorganizing is probably continuous, but it is generally described as occurring in stages and substages. Piaget listed four main stages which children pass through in their cognitive development.

The first stage is the sensorimotor stage (from birth to about fourteen months), in which through touch and sight, the learner begins to understand the basic relationships that affect him/her and objects in his/her experience and environment. These include space, location of objects, etc., but children cannot yet make use of abstract concepts.

During the operational stage (around two to seven years), the learner develops a symbolic system, which includes such skills as language, mental imagery, and drawing. The learner also begins to develop the mental ability to use concepts dealing with number, classification, order, and time, but uses these concepts in a simple way.
In the concrete operational stage (around seven to eleven years), the learner begins to use mental operations and acquire a number of concepts of conservation.

During the formal operational stage (around eleven onwards), the learner is able to deal with abstract concepts, and make hypotheses, inferences and deductions.

In summary, the Piagetian approach suggests that language is only an expression of a more general set of human cognitive activities. Proper development of the cognitive system is considered a necessary precursor of linguistic expression. The major task of the developmental interactionist then, is to identify the sequence of cognitive maturation and to explain how these cognitive developments are reflected in language acquisition.

Check Your Progress – 2

1. How is the Procedural Approach different from Chomsky's Approach?

2. Observe a parent speaking to a very young child (2-6 years) and an adult. List the features that you notice are different in adult-child speech and adult-adult speech. The language need not be English.

3. Complete the Table with the cognitive phases that Piaget suggests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Child's Capability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensori motor</td>
<td>birth to 2 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal operational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25.4 MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE

MI theory, which emphasizes the positive ways that people acquire knowledge and interact with the world, may be especially valuable to teachers working with mixed ability groups who have experienced repeated difficulties in learning. MI is not, however, a theory of education; it validates good practice and expands the capacity of teachers to bring out the best in their learners.

Information about learning styles and Multiple Intelligence (MI) is helpful for everyone especially for people with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder. Knowing your learners' learning style will help you develop coping strategies to compensate for your learners' weaknesses and capitalize on their strengths.

(i) What do we mean by the term 'Multiple Intelligence'?

Multiple Intelligence are seven different ways to demonstrate intellectual ability.
(ii) What are the types of Multiple Intelligence?

- **Linguistic Intelligence**
  
  Children with this kind of intelligence enjoy writing, reading, telling stories or doing crossword puzzles.

- **Visual/Spatial Intelligence**
  
  Ability to use words and language. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and are generally elegant speakers. They think in words rather than pictures. They may be fascinated with mazes or jigsaw puzzles, or spend their free time drawing, building with Legos.

- **Logical/Mathematical Intelligence**
  
  Ability to reason, logic and numbers. These learners think conceptually in logical and numerical patterns making connections between pieces of information; always curious about the world around them. These learners ask lots of questions and like to do experiments.

- **Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence**
  
  Ability to control body movements and handle objects skillfully. These learners express themselves through movement. They have a good sense of balance and eye-hand co-ordination (e.g., ball play, balancing beams). By interacting with the space around them, they are able to remember and process information.

- **Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence**
  
  Ability to produce and appreciate music. These musically inclined learners think in sounds, rhythms and patterns. They immediately respond to music either appreciating or criticizing what they hear. Many of these learners are extremely sensitive to environmental sounds (e.g., cricket ball, bells, dripping taps).

- **Interpersonal Intelligence**
  
  Ability to relate and understand others. These learners try to see things from other people’s point of view in order to understand how they think and feel. They often have an uncanny ability to sense feelings, intentions and motivations. They are great organizers, although they sometimes resort to manipulation. Generally they try to maintain peace in in-group settings and encourage co-operation. They are skilled in using both verbal (e.g., speaking) and non-verbal language (e.g., eye contact, body language). Children who are leaders among their peers, who are good at communicating and who seem to understand others’ feelings and motives possess interpersonal intelligence.

- **Intra-personal Intelligence**
  
  Ability to self-reflect and be aware of one’s inner state of being. These learners try to understand their inner feelings, dreams, relationships with others, and strengths and weaknesses. These children may be shy. They are aware of their own feelings and are self-motivated.

**Check Your Progress – 3**

1. "Knowing individual learner’s learning style can help the language teacher to devise learning strategies to enhance their performance." State what
The language teachers have always been interested in finding out why L2 learners make mistakes. They wish to correct such mistakes in order to make sure that the learners do not repeat their mistakes. However, it is a well-known fact that error correction would be meaningful if the teacher knows the cause or the reason for the error. Contrastive analysis and error analysis are useful tools to understand the mistakes made by the students.

25.5.1 Contrastive Analysis

Let us understand the thinking that led to both contrastive analysis and error analysis. Developments in psychology and linguistics over the last fifty years or so have provided radically different answers to questions such as: How do people learn languages? And why do language learners make mistakes? Around the 1950’s behaviourist psychology was in vogue and had tremendous impact on the linguistic thinking of that time.

This way of thinking has very interesting implications for second language learning. The L2 learner is, by implication, one who has already learned a set of habits relating to the system of her/his L1. Now, when this learner starts learning a second language (L2), s/he has to learn a fresh set of habits pertaining to the system of the second language. The structuralist-behaviourist belief was that since a new system had to be learned (i.e., L2), the system that had already been learned (i.e., L1), would interfere and create difficulties. In other words, since each language represents a unique system, there are bound to be differences between the system of L1 and L2. For the structuralists, therefore, those features of the system of L2 which were different from or dissimilar to the features of the system of L1 were responsible for the learner’s errors or mistakes. This phenomenon was often referred to as ‘interference’ or ‘transfer’ which, simply stated, meant that second language learners tend to carry over certain features of their L1 into the second language they are engaged in learning. When there is similarity between the features of the two languages there is no learning problem, but when there is a mis-match or dissimilarity, errors arise. This analysis of the two languages is known as contrastive analysis. This being the case, the structuralist – behaviourist position regarding second language learner’s errors was that they represented a failure on the part of the learner to learn a new set of habits, as well as, a failure to modify her/his earlier set of habits. In a nut-shell, this view maintained that

a. Errors represent a failure to learn a new set of habits,

b. Errors, if allowed to continue, will become set habits since language learning is habit-formation, and

c. Errors are caused by interference whereby features of L1 are carried over or transferred into the L2 by the learner.

25.5.2 New Perspective on Errors

Partly as a challenge to the basic tenets and claims of contrastive analysis and partly in order to provide a fresh approach to learners errors the notion of error analysis was first proposed in the late 1960’s. As We have pointed out earlier, the rise of
cognitive psychology and the post-structural Transformational-Generative thinking in linguistics gave a new mentalist orientation to our views regarding language learning and learners' mistakes. Language learning was no longer looked at merely as a matter of habit-formation but rather as a mental activity. This mental activity entailed the process of problem-solving and intelligent language data processing. The language learner was now looked at as someone who was actively using her/his mental faculties to make sense of the language data provided to her/him, and making assumptions about the structure which led to intelligent hypotheses. This focus on the mental activity of the learner provided a new perspective on learners' errors. If the learner was using her/his mind to process the language being learnt, errors could not be viewed as 'bad' or as failure to learn. Errors had to be looked at as positive signs of mental activity on the part of the learner, as well as, clues to the direction of the learners' thinking.

Let us take a non-linguistic example to illustrate this new perspective on errors. Several creatures have been pointed out to a child and s/he has been told that they are birds. s/he makes a mental note that all these creatures called birds have wings and can fly. So s/he makes an assumption that anything that has wings and flies must be a bird. Then this child sees a bat. Based on her/his assumptions about birds, s/he hypothesizes that this bat also must be a bird. Of course, her/his hypothesis is wrong and we tell her/him that the bat is not a bird but a mammal. The important thing here is to look at the child's identification of the bat as a bird as a positive indication that the child is 'thinking' and making intelligent (albeit wrong, as in this case) assumptions and hypotheses. Now let us take a linguistic example. Suppose a learner of English as a second language (or for that matter, as a first language) comes out with the sentences "he go to school everyday". There is a very obvious error in this sentence but this error could be due to the fact that the learner has heard and successfully produced such sentences as: 'I go to school every day', 'You go to school every day' and 'They go to school every day' without anyone saying that there was anything wrong with those sentences. So the learner goes ahead and creates the sentence 'He go to school everyday' which turns out to be wrong. The proponents of error analysis would, of course, call this an error, but they would also see this as a positive sign that the learner is mentally active in processing the second language data and arriving at some sort of rules according to which the 'system' of English works. As such, they would be reluctant to treat it as a 'failure to learn' or 'bad habit-formation'. We must, point out here, that this new attitude to learners' errors does not imply approval of errors, or absence of corrective or remedial teaching. It does, however, mean looking at errors as 'attempts at learning' rather than as 'failure to learn'.

25.5.3 Types of Faults

As stated earlier, all learning involves making mistakes, and so does learning an L2. However, it is essential for us to know what are the mistakes that the L2 learner makes, and how different are they from the mistakes that a learner makes in his mother tongue. There are, in fact, three different types of faults according to Pi Corder (1971).

(i) **Errors:** Error is a grammatically incorrect form that indicates that the learner has not mastered the code of the second language. If the learner says, "He sleep" instead of "He sleeps", or "My sister is going to his school" instead of "her school", it means the learner has not mastered or learnt the correct grammatical forms and the rules that govern the language. Such grammatical faults are called errors.

(ii) **Mistakes:** These are faults due to socially inappropriate forms. These are the forms that are grammatically correct but socially inappropriate. Such faults are called mistakes.

(iii) **Lapses:** These are faults that can be best described as slips of the tongue or pen. They are not a matter of great concern as all of us, at one time or the other, make silly slips due to carelessness, sloppiness or just inadvertently.
However, one has to be on one’s guard, especially if one is a teacher, in deciding when a lapse is not a lapse at all, but an error. If a learner, while writing a composition, spells the word 'Deceive' as 'Decieve' or the word 'husband' as 'husbend,' the first such occurrence will have to be treated as a lapse, i.e., a slip of the pen perhaps. But if the same thing is repeated in the same or subsequent compositions by the same learner, it would have to be treated as an error representing an incorrect or faulty learning of the spelling system of English.

25.5.4 Some Major Sources of Errors

a) **L1 pattern used in L2:**

This class of errors is the same as what used to be known as ‘mother tongue interference.’ In such cases, the system that had already been learnt (L1) would interfere with the learning of the new system (L2) due to the phenomenon of interference or transfer. This phenomenon simply means that L2 learners tend to carry over certain features of their L1 into the second language.

b) **Overgeneralization**

Those who believe that language learning is a thinking process rather than a set of habits believe that the learner forms hypotheses about the language system that s/he is learning, and generalizes them in form rules of the second language. Now errors occur when this learner ends up making wrong generalizations about the input in his/her environment. In this type of error the learner often rightly captures the 'larger' generalization, but does not take into account restrictions to the rule.

For example,

(i) At the elementary level, both English children learning their mother tongue and L2 learners of English produce forms such as goed, sittcd, cutted, mowes, etc.

   The learner must have successfully produced such sentences as 'I eat food', "You eat food", "They eat food". Since no one must have called these sentences wrong the learner went on to create "He eat food". Now this is certainly an error but this can also be seen as a positive sign of mental activity in processing the language data and arriving at some sort of rules. Hence it can't be termed as 'failure to learn'; rather it does mean an 'attempt at learning'.

(ii) From such data as

   We desire that . . . . .
   I wish that . . . . . .
   I know that . . . . . . .

the learner produces the rules that an embedded sentence as object of the verb takes the form of a noun clause beginning with 'that'. Then he produces the error:

* I want that India should win the cricket match.
   ('Want', an exception, does not take a noun clause as object).

c) **Reduced System**

Both overgeneralization and the use of a reduced system seems to be attempts to simplify the target language system.
The reducing of the system may be of two kinds:

(i) The more radical reduction is when some part of the target language system—such as the tense system, the articles, the plural terms—is dispensed with, resulting in the loss of some meaningful contexts. This gives us such sentences as:

I go to market and buy apple
She sit there; he go

This sort of reduction may be perhaps the result of a communication strategy on the part of the L2 learners. If she stops to think of rules, she loses fluency, and her listeners become impatient; so she opts for communication by means of the content words.

(ii) A less ‘radical’ type of reduction is when some rule is absent in the learner’s system; this may not involve the loss of any meaning contrasts. For example, the Subject-Auxiliary inversion rule is absent in the interrogative system illustrated by:

Where you have left your books?
Why you are going to college today?

Here again, the reduction is the result of a communication strategy.

d) False Hypothesis

Sometimes the learner arrives at a completely false hypothesis on the basis of the restricted language data that she comes across. The responsibility for leading him/her to such hypothesis may be with the teaching materials, which may contain false clues.

e.g.—An instance of the fairly common mistake of treating ‘too’ as synonymous with ‘very’, resulting in such sentences as:

The weather is too fine today.
He wanted to marry her because she was too beautiful.

It may be safer to teach ‘too’ by itself, without associating it with ‘very’ at all.

e) Confusion of Structures

‘Many pattern drills and transform exercises’ says Jack Richards, ‘are made up of utterances that can interfere with each other to produce a hybrid structure’. An example he gives is:

Teacher. instruction Student
He walks quickly (change to continuous form) ‘He # walks quickly’

f) Inconsistent Errors

Children produce inconsistent errors at the time when they are trying to incorporate a new rule into their system. At such a time they may produce utterances, some of which show the operation of the new rule and some others that show the omission of the new rule. Their inconsistency is the symptom of development. Similarly, in second language learning, in the beginning, the learner may produce inconsistent errors with regard to new rules that she is trying to incorporate into her system.

But note the use of the definite article in the following passage, which is from an ‘advanced’ Indian learner.
In the meantime the driver stopped the engine. He tried to start it again when the conductor whistled. Engine did not start. In the meantime conductor decided to check the bus. Conductor asked me about my ticket; I had not bought it by then, I asked the conductor for the ticket. By now engine was on, then he whistled and bus went away.

Here the writer correctly uses the definite article with the nouns - engine, conductor and bus four times, and (incorrectly) omits the definite article with the same nouns four times.

The writer is apparently a learner who has had several years of instruction in English (probably a Secondary / Senior Secondary student), who therefore ought to have some rules (right or wrong) of article usage. How then did this error happen?

One can conclude that there are areas of particular difficulty in English where the facts of the language are not amenable to being described by any simple rules (e.g. article, prepositions, tenses), wherein the L2 learner has given up the attempt to form rules and has reconciled himself/herself to operating by a hit-or-miss method.

25.5.5 Coping with Errors

In error analysis, as stated earlier, some preliminary questions need to be asked. These questions are:

a) Are the errors random or systematic?

b) Are the mistakes or errors trivial or serious and crucially important?

c) Are there any ways of explaining why particular errors occur?

d) What are the best ways to prevent recurrence of errors?

In order to arrive at answers to these questions, error analysis makes a distinction between errors, mistakes and lapses (we have already discussed this distinction in an earlier section). Clearly, lapses or slips of the tongue or pen have to be treated as trivial and hence, ignored. The performance of the learners is then processed for finding answers to the above mentioned questions. This processing involves several steps which we discuss below.

1) Recognising a fault: Given a learner’s sentence as data, the first question that needs to be asked is “Is this sentence possible in the language being learnt?” This question relates to the formal structure of the learner’s sentence and has no reference to the social or textual context. It is a question as to whether the sentence is well-formed according to the rules of the grammar of the target language. If the answer to this question is in the negative we are faced with an error, an ungrammatical construction. If, on the other hand, the answer is in the positive, we have a grammatically correct sentence. Then we need to ask a second question: “Is the sentence appropriate and acceptable?” This question has reference to the socio-cultural context and to the given social conventions. Again, if the answer to this question is in the negative, we are faced with a mistake i.e., some contravention of the social code. If, however, the answer to this question is also positive, there is nothing further for the error analyst to do, as we have a grammatically correct and socially appropriate sentence.

2) Describing a fault: Given that the learner’s sentence is found to contain some mistakes or errors, we need to describe or characterize the fault. If it is a formal, grammatical error we have to determine the level of language structure to which it relates - sound system, word formation, grammar, or meaning. This exercise of characterizing the fault is useful since it tells the user something about the nature of the error or the difficulty that the learner is experiencing.
teacher whether a learner commits errors (and if so, at which level) or that she is grammatically competent but makes a lot of mistakes. It also helps the language teacher focus attention on the specific areas in which the learner needs to be guided.

3) **Explaining the fault:** Once the fault has been recognized and described, be it error or mistake, we need to look for a plausible explanation for the appearance of the fault. The error or mistake could occur:
   a) because of sheer carelessness or laziness;
   b) because the item that appears as a fault has never been taught or brought to the notice of the learner;
   c) because the learner has formed some wrong hypothesis about the formal structure or the social conventions relating to the target language;
   d) because some formal or social features relating to the learner's first language have 'interfered' and have been carried over into the target language (notice that it is only this last case where contrastive analysis is of any help to the analyst or the L2 teacher).

4) **Remedying the faults:** Depending upon the kind of answers and information the first three steps in the process of error analysis provide, the teacher can prepare teaching materials, special exercises or intensive drills or even explanations in order to correct or remedy the error or mistake. Systematic error analysis also can help the teacher in ignoring faults that are mere lapses, and concentrating on the faults that are crucially important.

**Check Your Progress - 4**

1. **What** is the behaviourist - structuralist explanation for second language learners making mistakes?

2. Explain the distinction between errors, mistakes and lapses.

3. How do the cognitivists mentalists explain language learners errors? Differentiate them from the Behaviourists.

**25.6 LET US SUM UP**

In this unit, we have presented you with the major American and European learning theories of the twentieth century, on which language learning is based. The theories and approaches that we have discussed are:
It is essential for an English teacher to understand these theories/approaches, because they have influenced second language acquisition theories as well as teaching methodologies. Also, all these theories give an insight into the language learning process of the learner, so to that extent it helps you understand your student better.

We have then gone on to talk a little about Multiple Intelligence of the individuals to impress upon the teacher to devise teaching strategies that cater to different intelligences appropriately. This will help the teachers to get the best out of the individual students in terms of performance with specific reference to classes X and XII.

Finally we have exposed you to the role of errors in learning the language. In this part we have endeavored to highlight the causes/sources of errors so as to enable you to review the errors that your students commit and think about the tools to plug such errors that would in turn enhance your students’ performance.

25.7 KEY WORDS

performance: the actual sentences in use in real-life situations which demonstrates the way the learner uses his/her knowledge of the structure of the language; it is an act of encoding or decoding the internalized language structures

behaviourist theory: a theory of psychology which states that human and animal behaviour can and should be studied in terms of external processes only. It led to theories of learning which explained how an external event (a stimulus) caused a change in the behaviour of an individual (a response), without concepts like ‘plans’, ‘ideas’, ‘attitudes’.

stimulus: that which produces a change or reaction in an individual

response: the behaviour which is produced as a reaction to the stimulus

habit formation: the process of language learning, according to behaviorists, is the matter of habit-formation; the habits become fixed or automatic through imitation, practice and reinforcement by way of approval or appreciation.

reinforcement: a stimulus that follows the occurrence of a response and affects the probability of that response occurring or not occurring again. Stimulus that enhances the likelihood of a response is known as positive reinforcement, and the stimulus that decreases the likelihood of a response is known as negative reinforcement; if no reinforcement is associated with a response, the response may eventually disappear.
full form being Language Acquisition Device, it is the language learning process which enables the child to make hypotheses about the structure of the language in general and about the structure of the language s/he is learning in particular. The hypotheses so formed by the child are tested in its use of the language and are matched with the new linguistic inputs that s/he receives constantly from their immediate environment.

**multiple intelligence:**

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), often applied to children and young adults, may cast some light on adult learning strengths and abilities. Gardner's theory defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings. MI theory counters traditional views that intelligence can be measured through IQ tests and contends that all humans are made up of varying kinds and degrees of intelligences. Currently, eight forms of intelligence have been recognized: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial-visual, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist.

MI theory, which emphasizes the positive ways that people acquire knowledge and interact with the world, may be especially valuable to teachers working with adult students who have experienced repeated difficulties in learning. MI is not, however, a theory of education; it validates good practice and expands the capacity of teachers to bring out the best in their students.

**error:**

Error is a grammatically incorrect form that indicates that the learner has not mastered the code of the second language. It is systematic, and thus, can be predicted.

**interference and transfer:**

Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to foreign language and culture. Transfer occurs at all times in the learning of L2. If the features of L1 and L2 are similar, the learner will successfully transfer the L1 features to L2. But if there are differences and even then the learner transfers the features from L1 to L2, interference occurs.

**overgeneralization:**

In this type of error the learner often rightly captures the 'larger' generalization, but does not take accounts of restrictions on the rule.

**contrastive analysis:**

the comparison of the linguistic systems of two languages, for example the sound system or the grammatical system.
Contrastive analysis is based on the following assumptions.

a. the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language.
b. These difficulties can be predicted especially in those areas, where the two languages differ the most.

L1/first language: a person's mother tongue or the language acquired first.

L2/target language: the language which a person learns later after the mother tongue.

lapse: a mistake made by a learner when speaking or writing which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness and so on

mistake: often a socially inappropriate form.

developmental interactionist: this refers to the theories of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Piaget listed several different stages which children pass through in their mental development. These include the sensori-motor stage, the pre-operational stage, concrete operational and formal operational stage. Since the mental processes Piaget studied are important for language development, linguists and psycholinguists have made use of Piaget's ideas in studying how mental development and linguistic development are related.

Mentalist/cognitivist approach: an approach which is based on the belief that language learning is a process which involves active mental processes and not simply the forming of habits. It gives importance to the learner's active participation in the process of learning and using language.

25.8 SUGGESTED READINGS


ANSWERS

Check Your Progress – 1

1) Read 25.2 to find the answer

Check Your Progress – 2

1. Read 25.3.2 and 25.3.3 to find the answer.
2. Open ended.
3. Read 25.3.4 for the answer.

Check Your Progress – 3

1. Discuss with your friends/colleagues and analyse each pupil in your class. You will come up with interesting results.

Check Your Progress – 4

1. The Structuralists – behaviourists believed that the learner’s knowledge of L1 interfered with her/his learning of the L2 system, especially in those areas where the structures of L1 and L2 were dissimilar. This dissimilarity led to errors, as the learner failed to learn the new set of habits. These errors had to be eradicated immediately, before they became set habits, because for the behaviourists language learning was mere habit-formation.
2. Look at 25.5.3
3. Read 25.5.2

<table>
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<td>1. Abstraction of rules</td>
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