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Difficulties Faced By a Second Language Learner In Accordance With Structuralism and Post-Structuralism Theories

Abstract: The thirst for learning a new language would exist naturally for those who need to face the challenges thrown by this globalized world. As a result, people try to learn a new language which becomes almost mandatory for better outcomes overcoming many bottlenecks. Thus, there arise certain issues which are dealt in this paper vividly with reference to literary theories structuralism and post-structuralism. The theorists express their statements which buttress their theories but then few of those statements can be associated with the difficulties faced by a second language learner. The general ideas discussed by theorist Roland Barthes and other theorists also play a very important role in discussing the difficulties where they had analyzed everything in depth. The most important concept of Saussure about sign, signifier and signified is also brought out which can be inter linked with the difficulties of a second language learner. The fear factor also plays a significant role which is also dealt in the paper. It becomes clear at the end that if a learner needs to learn English as his/her second language, he/she should be cautious about what are all the possible factors which would mislead them in their process, few of which are discussed in this paper.

Key words: Difficulties, Ideas, Post-structuralism, Second language, Structuralism, Theorists.

I. Introduction

The proposed paper engulfs both literary theory and English language. Apart from being fundamental theories, traces and parts of structuralism and post-structuralism can be identified as theories which contain certain elements of difficulties of learning a second language. Though these two literary theories are different from each other in their ideas, the complications faced by a second language learner can be traced to a certain extent in both these theories. However, at the end of the day, most of the second language learners face many issues and few of those difficulties are dealt in the paper. There are many structuralists and post-structuralists who had contributed their own theories buttressing their statements on the basis of which these difficulties in the second language learning process are identified with ease and brought to light. Therefore one could easily get acquainted to these issues as a result of which they could go further towards sorting it out without much effort.

II. Difficulties Faced With Respect To Structuralism Theory

"Its essence is the belief that the things cannot be understood in isolation – they have to be seen in the context of larger structures they are part of" can be considered as the definition of structuralism. When one tries to learn a new language, this is probably the first difficulty which he/she undergoes. If a second language learner learns about a cultural idea which exists in the geographical location of the new language or in simple terms, be it an idiom or a phrase, the learner could not discern the original exact meaning behind it. The learner might go wrong if he/she considers the meaning in a literal sense. For example, if a person whose native language is not English, and suddenly got introduced to an idiom without the knowledge that it is actually an idiom like "It's raining cats and dogs", simply after learning the meaning of words in the second language. Obviously there is a chance of mistaking it, if one takes in a literal sense.

Therefore, background history is also important in learning a second language where as structuralism theory clearly tells that it cannot be studied in isolation but can be studied associating it with a larger structure. Another major difficulty is that the meanings of the words are arbitrary where there are minor exceptions for onomatopoeic words. As Saussure tells, they are highly relational which in fact confuses the second language learner. The learner also gets confused with the exact word which should be used in a particular situation. For instance, words 'hovel, hut, shed, house' are related in their meanings. However 'Hut' and 'Shed' are used primarily for shelter and storage respectively. This is the factor which confuses the second language learner. Keen observation on these differences is a must in order to hone their language learning skills.

III. Difficulties Of Contextual Meaning

Contextual meaning confuses the second language learner most of the times but it does play its trick even with the native speaker. Saussure states an instance from his life where he asked at a Southampton station for the Brighton train, and the ticket collector pointed to a bus standing outside the station and said, "That's it". From this example, one could easily get to know that 'a train' does not have to be a train always. Saussure's conclusion is that only thing which gives train its identity is its position in a structure of differences; its identity is purely relational. As Saussure tells, there are no intrinsic fixed meanings in a language and this should be considered by a second language learner. Another difficulty is that, a second language learner must also concentrate on minute details of the new language he/she learns. For instance, Roland Barthes pointed out the differences between boxing and wrestling. Though these words have different meanings, a second language learner has got all the possibilities to mistake one for another as these words are much related to each other. A native speaker knows the

difference well but not the second language learner. Though it is relational in meaning, it cannot be considered to be the right term of the usage.

IV. Traces Of Fears Of A Second Language Learner From Post-Structural Theory

Fear is one of the largest factor due to which most of the people lose confidence and hope and withdraw themselves from reaching their goals. Even in the process of second language learning, there comes a factor called language anxiety which is dealt in a post-structuralism theory. Post-structuralists believe that the anxious feelings seem remarkably pervasive whenever one has to use language at any level beyond that of casual daily exchange with people one knows very well.

The anxiety is that the language would express things one had not intended or convey the wrong impression or would lead to confusion. Though it is dealt in general with the language this quality can be compared with the situation of a second language learner while learning a new language. The second language learner constantly fears that there must be no miscommunication or misinterpretation in the language which he/she uses. Post-structuralists tell that when a language is intensively analyzed, then the language explodes into 'multiplicities of meaning'. This is the very same thing which happens for a second language learner. While the learner is in confusion with the word or its meaning, learner starts analyzing it and eventually as a result, gets more and more related meanings which leave the learner bewildered.

V. The Concept Of Sign, Signifier And Signified And Ideas Of Both The Theorists

The signifier is the pointing finger, the word, the sound image. On the other hand, the signified is the concept, the meaning, the thing indicated by the signifier. The native speaker might tell the word 'Horse' but the learner hears it like 'Hearse' or 'Horn' which has got an

entirely different meaning and signifies different things respectively. The slippage in the language also becomes an issue for the second language learner.

Fig.1 represents the pictorial description of terms Sign, Signifier and Signified.

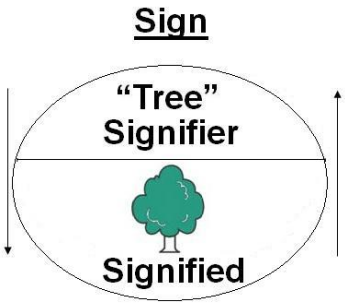

Fig.1

This is what the theory explains and it almost suits the condition of the second language learner who faces the difficulty in the very same area which has to be considered. Another example is that the word 'Lion' represents an animal but on the other hand it also represents courage, leadership etc. This vividly points out that the second language learner must be aware of the consequences of misinterpreted signifier and signified. Structuralism argues that there must be a structure in every text which explains why it is easier for experienced readers than non-experienced readers to interpret a text. Here experienced and non-experienced readers can be assumed as native and non-native learners because of the same result obtained.

Fig.2 represents the discussion between two people based on the signifier 'Lion'.

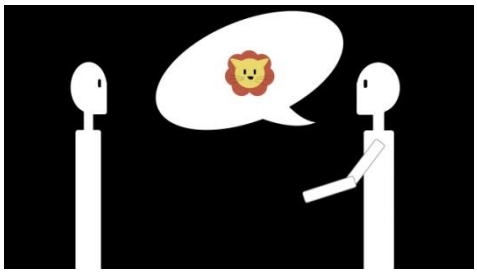

Fig.2

Again, the post-structuralists argue that to understand a text, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produced the object. From this idea

brought out by the post-structuralists, it is clear that to understand a language, particular geographical location and the background history of the language as well as at what context is it used must be well known for effective communication.

VI. Conclusion

Therefore, it is obvious that if one has to master English as their second language, then not only does grammatical skill and other language oriented skills would enhance and empower them but it is equally important to consider certain important factors available in literary theories as discussed in this paper. Though both structuralism and post-structuralism are considered to be theories, it can be also looked in other perspective where there are few factors which would help the second language learners to learn the second language is also present in it and this can be easily interpreted. In such a kind of an interpretation, one could come to know that these theories came into existence long back but it is even used to identify the issues faced by the second language learners at present. There are more literary theories which were brought into existence after structuralism and post-structuralism which also deal with language as their central focus. How far a text can be differently interpreted and solutions to it were suggested by various theorists like Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser. Thus, few of the difficulties faced by the second language learner are interpreted in accordance to literary theories as discussed in this paper.

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