Psycholinguistic features of Teaching Foreign Language

For Adults

Psycholinguistic approach takes its name from the field of psycholinguistics which is an integration of the two fields of psychology and linguistics. That’s why it is referred to as a hybrid field. The interdisdiplinary field of psycholinguistics emerged twice: once in 1900s in Europe and once in the middle of the 20 th century in the USA.

As it is known by everyone, no child fails to learn a native tongue and it is mainly learned before the age of five. Children are not taught language formally, but they all reach the same level in using their native tongue by the time schools begin. It is amazing how each child succeeds in acquisition and possesses the same general abilities in using the language without the proper help of grown-ups.

With the help of psycholinguistic knowledge, teachers can increase the interest and motivation of students, reduce the intrinsic difficulties of listening text and thus prepare them for the listening activity.

The intrinsic difficulty of a listening text consists of

- the speed of the speech,

-number of the unknown words (amount of intake in one class hour),

-interaction between previously learned topics and the new topic to be learned.

There are, in addition, extrinsic difficulties including

-interest, motivation of students,

-purpose of listening,

-and noise in the environment.

Psycholinguistic researchers have indicated that in teaching listening, the intrinsic and extrinsic difficulties should be overcome in order to reach to a highly qualified listening activity. For instance, a well-prepared listening text, consisting of 100 words, should include averagely 5-10 new vocabulary items from a text book at pre-intermediate level. Moreover, the teacher should make sure that the students are familiar with the topic treated in the upcoming text. The listening text, needless to say, should arouse the interest of the students. Again, it must be borne in mind that it is a psycholinguistically proven fact that the students should be positively motivated for the listening activity before, while and during the class period. The reading speed is an other listening related fact. Speed of speech in class is a serious factor, varying in degrees from elementary to an advanced level. The noise of the environment obviously affects the reading speed. Noise, an extrinsic difficulty, will surely affect the comprehension level of the students.

So it can be said that reading skill is mainly meaning based activity as proven by the psycholinguistic approach. Psycholinguistic approach points to the fact that a psycholinguistic control on reading reduces the intrinsic difficulty of reading text by arousing the interest of the students onto the reading passage. It provides authentic materials so as to increase the reading level. It must be noticed that if the students are not properly exposed to authentic materials they may fail in seeing their relevance to the real world.

Psycholinguistic approach and the writing skill:

Psycholinguistic approach has a functional effect in the field of writing in accordance with the mistakes on graphic notation. Similarly, 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. As the psycholinguistic approach indicates there are also mistakes caused by agraphia, which must be treated properly. Psycholinguistic approach helps teachers to find interesting topics for writing activities. It also indicates, via a needs analysis, the importance of creating reasons for writing and finding topics that students have information about or the topics they want to write on.

Psycholinguistic approach and the speaking skill:

Psycholinguistic approach has workable; I control over the field of teaching speaking as a skill. It has specified several difficulties on speaking. For example, the study oriented difficulties, environment dependent, difficulties and situation related ones are just three of them. The difficulties caused by students themselves are speaking defects and personality factors ( like introvert and extrovert students ). Speaking defects like voice disorders, stuttering, misarticulation are also psychological in origin caused by personality factors. There are also some traumatic disorders such as aphasia and autism caused by localized damage. It recommends therapies and counseling practices for such difficulties. Thus, the investigations of psycholinguistic approach have provided solutions for almost each type of language learning difficulty, its importance especially teacher training and the teaching of four language skills cannot be denied.

Adult Learners

﻿There are many benefits of studying for older learners, such as increased self-confidence, increased feelings of health and well-being, reduced feelings of isolation, and increased engagement in the community. ﻿



Many seniors wish to study a foreign language and there is now substantial evidence that they can learn a new language effectively. My experience is that senior learners are excellent language students for a number of reasons.

**Helping students hear**

Hearing loss may have a direct impact on learning and performance for senior learners. In order to decrease the negative effects of this auditory loss, teachers should try to accommodate the aging ear in a number of ways by:

* speaking clearly and ensuring that the students can see their face and lips.
* adjusting the volume for recordings and videos.
* repeating listening texts.
* using short films and videos which aid listening comprehension as students can see the face and lips of the speakers.
* ensuring that your classrooms have little background noise.

**Helping students see**

Defective vision increases dramatically as people age. Visual ability is particularly important in education as it is generally accepted that approximately 80% of all learning occurs through vision. To accommodate this loss in vision, here are some steps to follow:

* Use a larger print type for printed text.
* Make sure that senior students sit as close to the board as possible.
* Write very clearly on the board.
* Ensure that classrooms have a lot of natural light and that there is direct lighting for the whiteboard.

**Mobility**

As people age the body tends to lose some strength, flexibility and mobility. They may also suffer from arthritis and rheumatism. These changes may make it difficult for older learners to move around the classroom. To compensate for these changes we recommend doing the following things:

* Ensure that older learners have comfortable chairs and tables.
* Allow more time for older students to do whole class communicative activities where students have to stand up and move around the classroom.

**Memory**

Research indicates that cognitive development, recall, and problem solving may show decline with aging. In order to overcome this cognitive decline which may make it more difficult to learn a new language, teachers can help seniors develop and maintain their cognitive ability in a number of ways:

* Integrate memory exercises into classes. Use visual and auditory mnemonic devices, examples and memory associations to help seniors rehearse and later retrieve vocabulary and expressions from long-term memory.
* Systematically repeat and recycle grammar, vocabulary and expressions.
* Encourage students to draw on their wealth of experiences and to use cognitive strategies they have used successfully in the past in their current language learning environment.
* Allow more time for students to produce language without being interrupted.

**Building confidence / Reducing stress**

Many older learners fear failure and are more anxious than younger learners, perhaps this is because they accept the stereotype of the older learner as a poor language learner or because of previous unsuccessful attempts to learn a foreign language. Older learners need to feel comfortable and trust the teacher and the other students before they participate fully in the language classroom. A key role of the teacher is to reduce anxiety and build trust and self-confidence in the senior learner.  
Here are some of the things teachers can do to reduce stress and build self-confidence in older adult learners:

* Find out what our older learners’ motivations are for learning a language and adjust our methodology accordingly.
* Use humanistic techniques to build empathy between the teacher and students, and among the students.
* Reduce the focus on error correction to build learners’ self-confidence and to promote language production.
* Avoid timed tests which may make senior learners anxious.
* Give senior students more time to complete activities.
* Promote a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.

My experience is that any difficulties which senior learners may experience in the language classroom can be overcome through adjustments to the learning environment and material, attention to physical, affective and cognitive factors, and the use of an effective teaching methodology which focuses on the learning process rather than academic achievement.