

Pragmatic Learning Strategy For Oral Business English Communication Through Theory Integration



Education

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at creating a pragmatic learning strategy for developing the oral communication skills of students pursuing their Business Administration. For this purpose Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory have been integrated to generate a learning strategy that focuses on answering the dynamics of Business English communication in a productive and progressive manner. The paper explicates the theories individually in a detailed manner, it progresses to integrate the theories in a constructive manner that supports Oral Business English learning. The paper concludes by positing a learning strategy that utilises the framework of the integrated theories to yield best results in Oral Business English communication.

Introduction

In an era of fast paced advancement it is mandatory to update learner potential in order to target instruction that ensures students advancement at the proper pace. The nature of Business English is dynamic. It is an entirely functional category of English which cannot be restricted to mere delivery of words. Business English for Strevens (1988) is a branch of ESP "designed to meet specified needs of the learner". Business English consists of a network of systems interacting with one another which in the process is enriching, modifying, redefining and complying with the requirements of the trade and environment. It is formed of a network; interviews, telephone conversations, meetings, conference, presentations, negotiations etc. For education to be efficient and effective; expository interactions, activities and study material that befits their level of comprehension and kindles further development must be provided.

Background of the study

Business English is a genre of English Language Teaching (ELT) and a sub genre of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It was recognized as requiring a separate approach different from General English. The past two decades has seen business English develop at a phenomenal rate. This genre of ESP gained an identity in the late 60s and early 70s which was preoccupied with methodological preoccupations. In the early 1960s and 1970s Business English was demarcated by the exclusive vocabulary; business jargon, reading economic texts, answering comprehension questions and repetition drills. Neither was the learners' previous knowledge nor the practical potency of the study material prescribed, taken into consideration. Business English lessons were deplete of true-to-life business situations. From the 1970s onwards focus shifted to the four primary language skills; listening, speaking reading and writing within business contexts. Business English eventually focused on the functionality of language in corporate sectors. The spotlight shifted to teaching formulaic expressions applicable in business contexts and role-plays of hypothetical business situations. Late 80s concentrated on the development of business communication skills. The result of in-house training programmes organized by companies for employees, opportunities to attend courses in presentation techniques, negotiating and effective meeting skills were given to them. Only the past two decades laid emphasis on effective business communication; capacity to make use of the language in its most effective way.

Need for the present study

The Philippine Daily Inquirer (April 2012) published a report on the research conducted by Global English Corp.'s annual Business English Index (BEI). A score above 10.0 denotes the ability to communicate, collaborate and actively participate in business discussions and perform relatively complex tasks. India had scored 5.57 which is a far cry from the standard requirement. The survey also revealed, English skills are considered essential for career advancement, 91% of employees stated English as paramount for securing and maintaining a job.

There are several factors that chiefly contribute to Business English learning. It is a coalescence of two reciprocally fundamental sectors; linguistic and socio-cultural systems. They amalgamate to create comprehensive language. Taking this into perspective, Business English cannot be viewed as an intransigent system but rather as a polysystemic and multidimensional systems. To match the status of Business English, the learning strategy employed must answer the requirements of the learner from linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions and lectures alone do not do justice to the subject. This denotes the need for a comprehensive learning strategy.

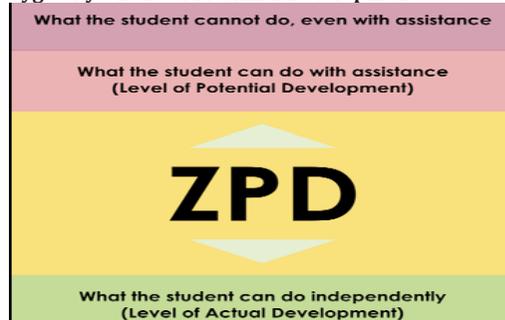
Initiation of a pragmatic learning strategy

Learning and development are correlated, yet the former cannot decide the latter and vice versa. To enhance learning and yield better results, exclusive characteristics of two influential theories of learning and development in the field of education were integrated; Zone of Proximal Development by Lev Vygotsky and Social Learning theory by Albert Bandura. It has been applied in the field of education independently and proven to be efficient. This study aims at integrating select features of both the theories to obtain the best outcome in the learning of Business English Communication.

Purpose of selection

The two theories were chosen as they share several commonalities and diversify in certain aspects to accommodate efficient learning. It accommodates language learning in a supportive environment and reinforces the subject matter in a dynamic manner. The integrated theory offers an excellent strategy for meaningful and productive learning. It facilitates effectual learning and encourages ingenuity and self-sufficiency. Meaningful learning has advantages over rote learning said Kinchen (2006). As knowledge acquired meaningfully according to Novak (1998) is retained longer, as something that is meaningful to a person would be remembered easily and for longer period. The two theories were adopted as they provided maximum scope for pragmatic learning.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development



Angela Lui (2012) Figure1. Diagrammatic representation

of Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development demarcates between imminent and actual mental development. There are two developmental levels: the actual level and imminent level. Actual level depicts the growth that has taken place intellectually and imminent growth speaks of the growth of the individual that is possible to take place with the help of peers and teachers. Teaching above or below a student’s existing comprehension capacity will be unsuccessful to advance development because of the lack of a challenging situations. At the same time, teaching above student comprehension is ineffective for progress.

Collaborative activities under adult custody encourage superior productivity. Interaction with peers and the environment kindle learning to take place effectively and this lead to skills development at a personal level professes Vygotsky. Behaviour and environment are reciprocally influential. Vygotsky’s ideology states that culture, language and environment have a great influence on the learning process. Culture, language and environment are the triumvirate influences on Oral Business English communication. Language and dialogue play a vital role in development said Vygotsky. Tool use was strongly advocated by Vygotsky. He said it helps them relate more effectively to their environment and facilitates acquisition easily.

Bandura’s Social Learning theory

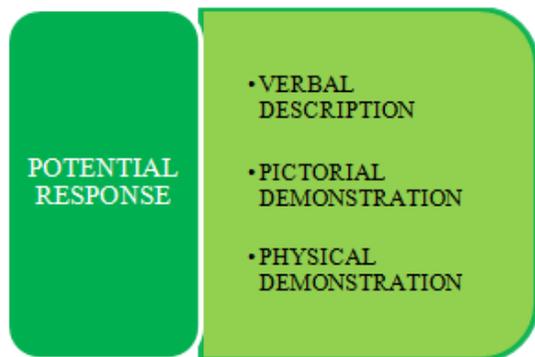


Figure2. Prime elements for holistic learning according to Albert Bandura’s Social Learning theory

Social Learning Theory draws attention to the influential function of “vicarious, symbolic and self -regulatory processes” that stimulate activity. Verbal coding is the significant representational system that enhances observational learning. The teacher needs to explain verbally to the learners the subject before modelling the process. Verbal symbols are the medium through which modelled behaviour are stored in memory.

In the course of competence gaining, individuals observe the consequences of action. The array of results leads to the development of a hypothesis concerning responses befitting corresponding situations. This serves as a model for future moves. Social learning theory justifies human behaviour as the ‘continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants’ Bandura (1977). ‘People are not simply reactors to external influences. They select, organise and transform the stimuli that impinge upon them’ Bandura (1977). Motivation set by an individual and the results deduced impact their behaviour and act as ‘principal agents of their own change’. In the course of competence gaining, individuals observe the consequences of action. The array of results leads to the development of a hypothesis concerning responses befitting corresponding situations.

Social Learning theory professes the distinctiveness between acquisition and performance; everything acquired is not put into practise. Abstract modelling is exposure to performances which exude tentative responses post which the learners are made to respond to analogous situations but not replicate what was observed. Activities are observed and if found to elicit af-

firmative response, is favoured for acquisition. Responses of evaluative significance from others also play a decisive role in retention and implementation of behaviour acquired observationally. Selective acquisition and improvisation of skills observed leads to enhanced learning.

Theory Integration

Vygotsky professed that learners must be taught within their Zone of Proximal Development to elicit best results and Bandura’s theory is the incorporation of behavioral and cognitive theories. Learning is not subjective only by behaviour but is also influenced by cognitive processes that take place. From the social learning standpoint an individual is neither forced by personal impulse nor are they compelled by the surroundings. Rather there is a ‘continuous reciprocal interaction’ of the individual and external influences. This teaching coincides with Vygotsky’s ideal that learning is a profoundly social process; culture, language and environment play a significant role in facilitating learning. Vygotsky fervently encouraged the usage of tool. Verbal, pictorial and physical demonstrations were likewise propounded by Bandura as learning tools. Vygotsky’s theory of collaborative learning is repeated in Bandura’s theory too.

Bandura’s Social Learning theory impresses the distinction between acquisition and performance. Learners don’t blindly emulate what they observe. Only if an action engenders positive feedback, they repeat what is observed and this deduces favourable results of acquisition and impression upon the learner. For this deliberation to take place between the learner and the environment both the agent and the beneficiary need to be of the same level, which implicitly implies Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development.

Integrated theory relevance to Oral Business English Communication Learning

Teaching above or below a student’s existing comprehension capacity will be unsuccessful to advance development because of the lack of a challenging situations. At the same time, teaching above student comprehension is ineffective for progress. Business English is of various types; general or job specific, syllabus designed for students and corporate employees. There is also the sub-classification of preliminary, intermediate and advanced Business English courses. Hence it is essential to determine the level and requirements of the learner prior to initiation of learning. This will help in the administration of ample level of academic assistance and course material for Business English.

Interaction with peers and the environment kindle learning to take place effectively and this leads to skill development at a personal level professes Vygotsky. Business English communication always takes place in coalition with colleagues and the variation in business environments determines the organisation conversation. This emphasises the need to engage students in group activities capitalising on each other’s resources and skills by constructing simulative meetings, telephone conversations etc. This will lead to profiting from each other’s potential by assuming asymmetrical roles. The role of the teacher as Vygotsky advocated was to mentor, monitor the progression of the sessions and guide the students whenever required.

Vygotsky mentions; culture, language and environment influence learning to a great extent. The triumvirate plays a pivotal role in Oral Business English communication. Business communication needs to take into consideration cultural differences since globalisation has made the world a global village. The time when American English or British English held sway of global commerce is history, today the language that governs international commerce is corporate communication. It is essential to bring about awareness among the Business Administration students of the fundamentals of corporate communication. Communication is governed predominantly on the environment in which it is utilised. The corporate ambience and its various genres can be enlivened in the classroom for the students to familiarise themselves of the impending corporate culture they

are to face. corresponding to this theory Bandura in his Social Learning theory propagated that vicarious, symbolic and self-regulatory process are essential for holistic learning. Conforming to this principal, firstly the students can be lectured on the topic, following the theoretical elaboration of the subject, video clippings that emulate what has been imparted can be screened. Case studies can be used as tools to engage students in discussion about the topic. Lastly learners may be grouped and made to collaboratively create simulations of group discussions, negotiations etc. People are not simply reactors to external influences. They select, organise and transform the stimuli that impinge upon them Bandura (1977). Learners being adults, it is inevitable that they will carefully glean behaviour that is socially accepted and replicate. Discussions on case studies also give the students to deliberate and clarify doubts concerning what had been imparted. Therefore the fear of blind imitation is eliminated. This triumvirate process would impress upon the students the nucleus of the subject and would ensure students are habituated and accustomed to Business English communication culture, language and environment. This learning strategy would emphasise what was taught in a productive and progressive manner.

Tool use was strongly advocated by Vygotsky. He said it helped them relate more effectively to their environment and facilitated

acquisition easily. The learning tools employed can be borrowed from Bandura's vicarious, symbolic and self-regulatory process. Lectures, case studies, video clippings and students themselves are tools as they participate in simulation.

Bandura posited that language acts a medium of acquisition. The subject to be acquired being Oral Business English communication, students can experience a double fold benefit as they learn the subject, through the subject. In other terms pragmatism is the helm of the learning strategy.

Conclusion

A comprehensive understanding of the theories; Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Albert Bandura's Social Learning theory were elaborated. The amalgamation process of the two theories to produce a symbiotic learning strategy has been explained with reference to Oral Business English communication. Theory integration is the nucleus of the learning strategy that would aid the study of Oral Business English communication more effectively. It has founded an innovative yet dynamic learning strategy that facilitates and guarantees the perseverance of accomplished as well as realistic learning.

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