DISCUSSION FORUM 3 – TEACHABILITY HYPOTHESIS

The Teachability Hypothesis is a notion, which shows that instruction helps learners to learn a second language in a more speedy way. In other words, it can speed up the rate of learners’ L2 development if the learners are taught or instructed on a level that is one stage above their level. Pienemann observed that instruction was most effective when it reflected the stage just beyond the learners’ current stage of interlanguage.

As a person who strongly believes in Krashen’s “i+1 theory”, I also believe in the Teachability Hypothesis because, considering only the classroom instruction, there would not be any progress in learners’ interlanguage except acquiring some input from their surrounding or except informal instruction supposing that the teachers gave instruction just exactly at the students’ level. Therefore, I believe that classroom instruction that is a little above the students’ level would be obviously more effective for students in learning an L2. However, instruction should not be too much above their level. Furthermore, Gass (1982) asserts that instruction could speed learners along their acquisition of certain structures, but that the sequence of acquisition is not changed by the instruction. And at this point, there is a general agreement that learners acquire languages in a specific order, as in the case of Krashen’s Natural Order Hypothesis. Krashen claims that this order is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes (Haley, 2002). Krashen recommends that teachers not attempt to time instruction to match learners’ development, but emphasizes the value of language teaching methods based on the
provision of “Comprehensible Input.” In his Input Hypothesis, Krashen defines comprehensible input as L2 input just beyond the learner’s current L2 competence (i+1), in terms of its syntactic complexity. If the input is understood and there is enough of it, the learner will automatically acquire the necessary grammar. He does not believe that focusing on any particular form will alter language acquisition (Lightbown, 1998).

At this point, Lightbown (2000) also states that planning lessons around on developmental sequences is “neither feasible nor desirable” (p443). I agree with Lightbown’s statement because he states that knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in communicative interaction. From his statement, I can conclude that although there is natural order in learners’ acquisition, it may not be feasible and desirable if learners cannot communicatively use the rule that is taught. Furthermore, by considering Pienemann’s ideas, Haley also states that teaching of the more advanced stages did result in learners’ ability to use the new structures in written exercises and to explain the rules, but inability to produce the structures spontaneously. Another reason why I agree with Lightbown is that in Pienemann’s research he does not describe how the target structures were taught. I think this is very crucial in applying SLA research into teaching.

There are many kinds of approaches, methods and techniques in SLA teaching, so the idea of learning how the target structures are taught is more important than giving the rules according to the developmental stages. For these very important reasons, I agree with Lightbown and assert that we need to include the methodological research into the idea of developmental sequence.
REFERENCES:


