

THE IMPORTANT OF INPUT IN THE SECOND/ FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstrak: *Pembelajaran bahasa target (TL) merupakan proses “trial and error”, baik sebagai bahasa pertama, kedua maupun bahasa asing. Keberhasilan pembelajaran bahasa kedua/asing dipengaruhi oleh banyak faktor, termasuk faktor internal dan eksternal. Pakar bahasa seperti Ellis (1994), Brown (2000), Krashen (1985) dan Gass (dalam Ellis, 1994) menekankan bahwa faktor eksternal yang sangat mempengaruhi pembelajaran bahasa kedua/ asing adalah ketersediaan input. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membahas pentingnya input dalam pembelajaran bahasa kedua/ asing. Peran input dalam pembelajaran bahasa sangat signifikan. Proses pemerolehan bahasa tidak akan berhasil jika tidak ada input yang diberikan kepada pembelajar. Ada tiga pandangan yang berbeda terhadap peran input bahasa, yakni kalangan behaviorist, mentalist dan interactionist. Kaum behaviorist berpandangan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa berhasil karena adanya hubungan stimulus dan respon, dengan membentuk kebiasaan baru melalui penguatan dan latihan. Kaum mentalist berpandangan bahwa setiap pembelajar bahasa terlahir dengan Language Acquisition Device (LAD) yang secara otomatis melekat pada dirinya. Lebih jauh mereka juga berpendapat bahwa input diperlukan dalam pembelajaran maupun pemerolehan bahasa, tetapi hanya untuk memicu operasional LAD. Di sisi lain, kaum interactionist berpendapat bahwa proses pemerolehan dan pembelajaran bahasa sangat dipengaruhi oleh peran lingkungan pengguna bahasa dan mekanisme internal pembelajar bahasa dalam berinteraksi.*

Kata Kunci: *Input Komprehensif, Pembelajaran Bahasa Kedua/Asing, Peran Input*

Abstract: *Learning a target language is actually a process of trial and error, whether as the first, the second or even foreign language. The success of second/ foreign language learning is influenced by many factors, including internal and external factors of the language learners. The linguists, such as Ellis (1994), Brown (2000), Krashen (1985) and Gass (as cited in Ellis, 1994) emphasized one of the external factors which highly influences the second/ foreign language acquisition or learning is the availability of the input. This article is aimed to discuss the important of input in second/foreign language learning. The role of input becomes very significant in shaping the learners' language acquisition and learning. The process of acquisition will not be successful if there is no input given to the learners. There are three major views on language input, they are behaviorist, mentalist and interactionist. Behaviorist viewed that language learning is advanced by making a stimulus and response connection, by creating new habits through reinforcement and practice. Mentalists view that every language learner has special equipment in his/her mind to learn language which is called Language Acquisition Device (LAD). They view that input is needed in language acquisition/ learning, but only to “trigger” the operation of the language acquisition device. While*

interactionists view that the processes of language acquisition are mainly influenced by the role of language environment and the learner's internal mechanism in interaction activities.

Keywords: *Comprehensible Input, Second/ Foreign Language Study, The Role of Input*

INTRODUCTION

As known, English in Indonesia is taught as a foreign language, rather than a second language. It implies to the process of teaching and learning the language, especially how the English is learnt by the learners. The process of learning mostly occurred inside the school environment only, and dominated by classroom setting. Ellis (1994: 214) defined it as the educational setting. In educational setting, especially in Indonesia, providing the natural setting of English learning for the English learner is not easy, even it is impossible. It happens because English is learnt as the foreign language only, and doesn't use for daily communication by most of Indonesians.

Language learning is actually a process of trial and error, in which a learner form a hypothesis and later on prove it, abort it, or adjust it (Huang, 2003: 19). It means, when the learners learn the second language, probably, they meet many kinds of second language learning problems dealing with pronunciation, vocabularies, language structures, language interpretation, misuse, non-English constructions, misspelling, and so forth. Some learners might be able to overcome those problems, but for some learners, they might be unable to overcome it, and for those who unable to fix it, they will make a number of mistakes and even the errors. Moreover, according to Bloom (as cited in Ellis, 1994: 47) even the children also make errors when they acquire the first language.

The success of second/ foreign language acquisition is influenced by many factors. It can be from internal and also external factors of the language learners. According to some experts, such Ellis (1994), Brown (2000), and Krashen (1985), one of the external factors which highly influences the second/ foreign language acquisition or learning is the availability of the input. This article mainly focuses on the important of the input in the second/ foreign language acquisition.

DISCUSSION

Language Acquisition and Language Learning

These two terms look the same, or almost the same but they are different in nature. Many former linguists have characterized the differences between the terms, such as Ellis (1994), Brown (2000), Krashen (1985) and Corder (1974). They proposed the theory on how differentiate those two similar terms.

Before moving on the area of second/ foreign language acquisition, it is better for the writer to provide an overview of language acquisition. Normally, people will be able to use the languages for communication among the others for many kinds of purposes. The first language used by people to communicate is commonly called as mother tongue (L1). According to Brown (2000: 21), the acquisition of mother tongue is happened naturally, that is why, some people sometimes do not realized it as the process of language acquisition. Actually, through natural setting, people learnt their mother tongue since they were baby. Corder (in Richards, 1974: 20) added the learning of mother tongue is inevitable, and as a part of whole maturational process of the child.

In the very beginning age, the small babies babble and coo, cry, receive and send a number of unusual messages to the others. In this phase, we cannot easily recognize the babies' messages. As they reach the end of the first year, babies will make specific attempts to imitate words and speech sounds they hear around them (Brown, 2000: 21), and after that, the babies will use it. When the babies use the languages to say something, they will not directly able to use the language in a complex and long words construction. Probably, they will utter in two-words or three words sentences, such as "bye-bye Daddy", and "gimme toy". In this phase, we will easier to recognize the babies' messages. By the time, the process of first language acquisition will improve more and more.

Krashen (1985: 1) emphasized the two independent ways of developing ability in second language acquisition. He defined those two ways as acquisition and learning. According to him, acquisition is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, while learning is a conscious process that results in "knowing about" language.

After acquiring the first language, many people do not stop to learn the second, third or even fourth languages. Ellis (1997: 3) stated that the languages which are learnt subsequent to the mother tongue called "second language". Here, the second language is

not referred to the learning of second language only, but also the learning of third, fourth languages, and even the foreign language learning, while James (1998: 3) suggested the use of “target language” (TL) for describing the language to be learnt after the mother tongue. He preferred to use the term of “target language” in order to be neutral, rather than using the terms second or foreign language.

Ellis (1997: 3) has defined the second language acquisition as the systematic study of how people acquire a second language. Widdowson (in Ellis, 1997: 3) concluded second language acquisition as the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom. Adapted from the Ellis’ definition, foreign language acquisition also can be defined as a systematic study of how people acquire a foreign language. In line with Ellis, Johnson (2004: 3) stated that the current models of second language acquisition are linear in nature. They go from input into intake to the developing system of output. Corder (in Richards, 1974: 20) added that the learning of second language normally begins only after the maturational process is largely complete. Later on, the study of those languages, both second and foreign, often referred as the study of L2.

Learning the first and the second language is quite different in terms of processes. Corder (1967) has noticed, in the first language learning the learners start with no language behavior, while in the second language learning, the learners start with language behavior. In the first language learning, the learners may have the same motivation to learn. They have no option to learn another language, because people around them use that language as mother tongue (L1). But in the learning second language, the learners might have various motivations, such as they want to study abroad, they want to live in another country which use different language, and so forth.

Beside motivation as stated above, there are two major factors which influence the second language learning; those are external and internal factor (Ellis, 1994: 16). The external factor consists of social factors, such as learner’s attitude, age, social class, sex and ethnic identity (Ellis, 1994: 198-207), language input and interaction, while internal factor consists of learners’ language transfer, learners’ cognitive process and linguistic universals. Those factors take the significant role in the area of second/foreign language acquisition.

Comprehensible Input in L2

As stated on the previous part, this discussion will not discuss all the factors which influence the second language acquisition. In this chapter the writer will mainly focus on the input, as the external factor in the second language acquisition. Ellis (1994: 16) defined the input as the language learner is exposed to. Corder (in Richards, 1974: 22) has defined the input in language learning as “what goes in” not what is ‘available’ for going in. Corder assumed that the learners control the input for themselves to be their intakes. Adapted from the Ellis’ definition, Zhang (2009: 91) defined input in language learning as the language data which the learners are exposed to. From the definitions above, we can conclude that input is one of the important language factors which contribute to the development of language learning.

Even, the input is one of the important factors, but it will not be functioned maximum until it gets involved in interaction (Zhang, 2009: 92). If the learners able to internalize input into intake, the role of input is maximum to the development of language learning, and vice versa. Moreover, Corder (in Zhang, 2009: 92) also differentiates between input and intake in language learning. He mentioned that input as what is available to the learner, whereas intake refers to what is actually internalized by the learner. In other words, Sun (2008: 2) used the terms intake as converted input done by the learner. Intake is stored in the learner’s short-term memory, and some of the intake will be stored in the learner’s long-term memory as L2 knowledge (Ellis, 1997: 35). Finally, the L2 knowledge will be used by the learners to produce both spoken and written output.

Input can be in the form of spoken and written (Ellis, 1994: 26). In terms of spoken input may occur frequently in the form of interaction, for instance, the learners try to have a conversation with the native speakers, learners’ friends, and so forth. By having a conversation with the native speakers, the learners will get useful input directly from the users of target language. While written input may occur in the form of reading, for example: the learners read the native’s literary works, newspaper, and so on. In the case of reading the native’s writing, the learners actually will get written input. In terms of language learning input, Krashen (1985: 2) proposed what is so called “input hypothesis”. The input hypothesis claims that humans acquire the language in only one way; by understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input. It seems that Krashen’s input hypothesis is referred to acquisition, not learning (Johnson, 2004: 48).

Ellis (1994: 246-247) characterized the input to language learners into input text and input discourse. Input text is closely related with the native speakers actually say or write, while input discourse dealt with special kind of 'register' that is used when speakers address language learners. The example of input text can be seen from the study conducted by Williams in the 1990. He pointed out that many native speakers' questions in English were non-inverted, particularly when there is a high presupposition of a 'yes' answer, i.e.:

A : I'm studying poetry this year.

B : You're studying poetry this term?

While the discourse input is taken from the register used by caretaker and foreigner, called caretaker talk and foreigner talk. When caretakers speak to the children as the learner of mother tongue, they will adjust their speech as the input. In this case, the caretakers were the native speaker. Another discourse input is foreigner talk. Ellis (1994: 251) defined it as the language used by native speakers when communicating with non-native speakers. Moreover, foreigner talk shows many characteristics of caretakers talk.

The Role of Input in Learning L2/Foreign Language

Both in the first and the second language acquisition, input takes the importance role. Brown (2000: 41) stated the role of input in language acquisition is undeniably crucial, because the availability of input will influence the learner's output. Ellis (1994: 286) stated that there is substantial indirect evidence linking comprehensible input to acquisition. From those explanations, actually we cannot deny the importance of input in the area of second/ foreign language acquisition. This statement is also strengthened by the three major views (behaviorist, mentalist and interactionist), which consider the importance of input in language acquisition. They do not deny input has significant role for language learners.

The importance or input in second language acquisition also strengthened by many studies conducted by linguists in the previous time. There were many articles on the importance of input in second/ foreign language acquisition, for instance: Sun (2008) and Zhang (2009). Sun wrote a paper on the importance of input in second language acquisition which is entitled 'Input processing in second language acquisition: A discussion of four input processing models'. Her paper discussed the comparison four

different models of input-processing by examining those models. The aims of her discussion were to disambiguate discrepancies in terminologies, identify common emphases on gap-noticing and cognitive comparison. Based on the result of her discussion, Sun suggested the need for further research on the role of attention/consciousness in input-processing.

Zhang (2009) conducted a study entitled the role of input and output in the development of oral fluency. The participants of her study were Chinese English learners. She used two instruments to collect the data; tests of oral fluency and face-to-face interviews. The findings showed that non-native oral fluency could be obtained by giving efficient and effective input.

From the two studies above, the important of input became significant in shaping the learners' language acquisition. The process of acquisition will not be successful if there is no input given to the learners. Related to the issue of input in the second language acquisition, commonly there are three major views on it; those are behaviorist, mentalist and the last is interactionist. Each theory has different points of view in describing the input of language learning.

Behaviorist viewed that language learning is advanced by making a stimulus and response connection, by creating new habits through reinforcement and practice (Johnson: 2004: 18). The reinforcement and practice are ordered to establish links between stimuli and responses. Behaviorist views the process of language learning should be concerned with describing and explaining the language as a matter of humans' behavior (Corder, 1973: 22-23). We may assume that the effective language behavior will produce correct response of the language.

The second view on input is come from mentalists. They view every language learner has special equipment in his/her mind to learn language, and the equipment is called Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to the mentalists, input is needed, but only to "trigger" the operation of the language acquisition device (Ellis, 1997: 32). They mainly emphasized the language acquisition on language acquisition device, rather than the input.

The last view on input is come from interactionists. They emphasized on the importance of both input and internal language processing. Ellis (1997: 44) concluded that learning occurs as a result of complex interaction between the linguistic

environment and the learners' internal mechanism. Here, input and the learner's internal language processing are put in the equal level of importance. According to interactionists, the processes of language acquisition are influenced by the contribution of linguistic environment and the learner's internal mechanism in interaction activities (Zhang, 2009: 92).

Based on the general theoretical framework of language acquisition (Ellis, 1994: 349, figure 9.1) it can be seen clearly that input has significant role in language acquisition. Input is placed in the beginning stage of language acquisition process, and after that followed by intake, as the converted input. The process is not stopped only in the intake level, but it continued become the L2 knowledge. After that, the learners use the L2 to produce the output. In short, we can simply say that 'if there is no input, there will be no output', that is why input takes the important role in language acquisition.

The Ellis' general framework of language acquisition is widely accepted by the linguists. Her theory on language acquisition also can be generated into second/foreign language learning. So, input in language learning will lead the learners to the success of language mastery, not only knowing "about language" but also how to use the language for every single purpose.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion in the previous part, the writer simply concludes that input is very important in second/foreign language acquisition, because it contributes significantly to the language acquisition process, if there is no input, there will be no output. In this case, second/foreign language learning input is the language data in which the learners are exposed to, and it will contribute to the development of language learning through learners' interaction.

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