



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

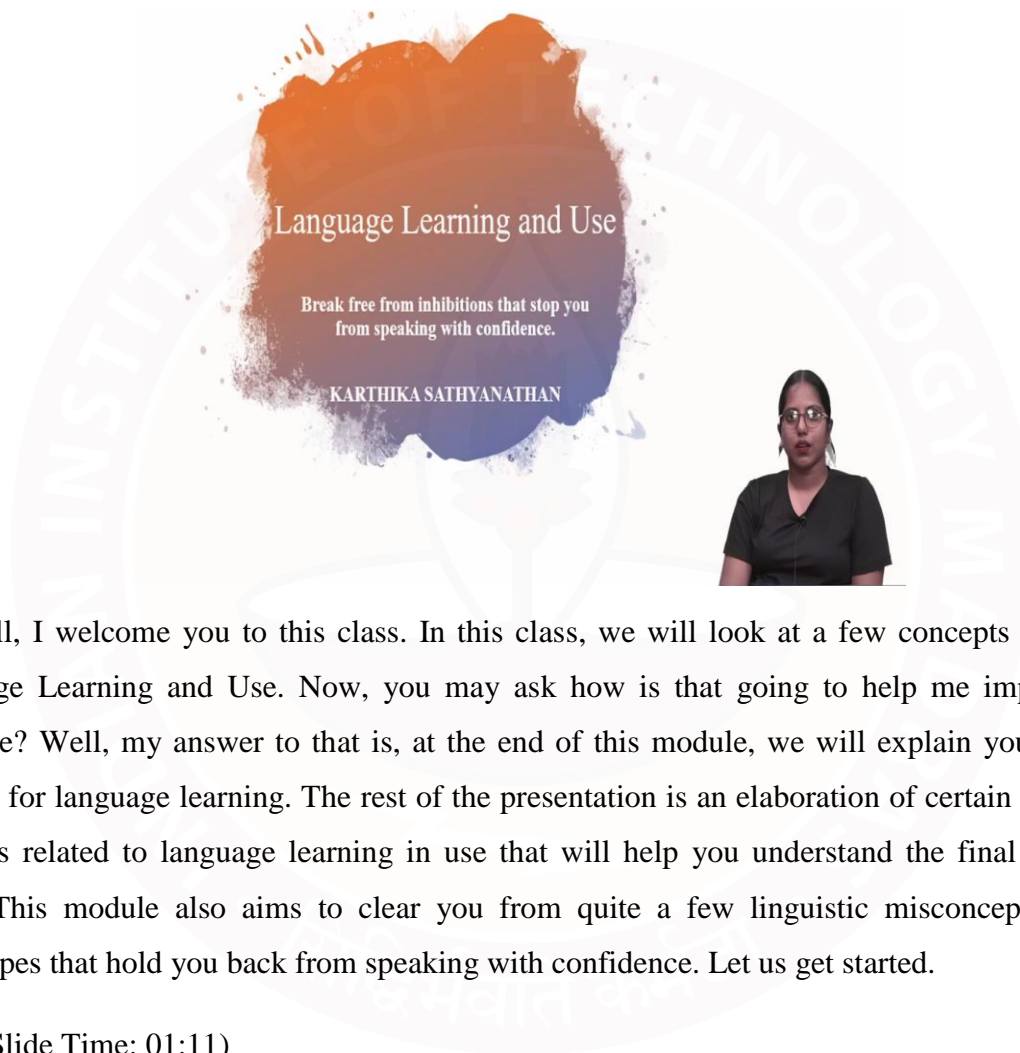
Copyright and terms of use

IIT Madras is the sole owner of the content available in this portal - onlinedegree.iitm.ac.in and the content is copyrighted to IIT Madras.

- Learners may download copyrighted material for their use for the purpose of the online program only.
- Except as otherwise expressly permitted under copyright law, no use other than for the purpose of the online program is permitted.
- No copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or exploitation, commercial or otherwise of material will be permitted without the express permission of IIT Madras.
- Learner acknowledges that he/she does not acquire any ownership rights by downloading copyrighted material.
- Learners may not modify, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale, create derivative works, or in any way exploit, any of the content, in whole or in part.

English – I (Basic English)
Karthika Sathyanathan
Department of Humanities and Social Science
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Language Learning and Use

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)



Hello all, I welcome you to this class. In this class, we will look at a few concepts related to Language Learning and Use. Now, you may ask how is that going to help me improve my language? Well, my answer to that is, at the end of this module, we will explain you the best practice for language learning. The rest of the presentation is an elaboration of certain important concepts related to language learning in use that will help you understand the final point we make. This module also aims to clear you from quite a few linguistic misconceptions and stereotypes that hold you back from speaking with confidence. Let us get started.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:11)

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN LANGUAGES ?

- Behaviorist model : Children learn languages by merely imitating what they hear .
- Mentalist model : Role of human brain in language acquisition and use .



Universal Grammar : A certain set of structural rules are innate to humans, independent of sensory experience.
LAD : Language Acquisition Device



Let us get started with a question. How do children learn languages? For a long time, for a very long time, people believed that children learn languages by imitating what they hear from their immediate surroundings until one person asked this very important question. That if it is all about imitating if it is all about listening to what is spoken around the child and the child imitating, how does or how come a child comes up with ungrammatical sentences? How come children make errors? No one around him speaks grammatically wrong sentence.

Let us take the case of your mother tongue. A two-year-old child, a three-year-old child, starts pronouncing certain words the wrong way. In spite of the fact that his parents and the people around him speak the same word with the correct pronunciation. So, how is it that the child is making errors? If the child is imitating his parents, if it is all about imitation, he should never make a mistake. So, this question was posed by Noam Chomsky. And that is when the behaviourist model which believed that children learn languages by merely imitating what they hear broke down.

And through this important question, that is, how do children come up with wrong sentences wrong, quote-unquote, "wrong sentences or grammatically incorrect sentences". And this question was posed by the very famous linguist Noam Chomsky. So, this question, he comes up with this model called The Mentalist model that says there is a good role of the human brain in language acquisition and use. So until then, so until then, people did not know that, or it was not discovered that the brain had a good role in language acquisition and use.

So, it was with Noam Chomsky inference; it was with Noam Chomsky's interference that the behaviourist model both broke down and what, what he came up with was what is known as The Mentalist model. So, he said that this lot of input around the child that is all the language, and this input is quite fussy and limited. Why is it quite fuzzy and limited? It is fussy because nobody is taking a class to a one-year-old or two-year-old child saying, look, these are the nouns in your language, and these are the adjectives in your language. The child, the brain of the child figures it out, all by itself.

So, therefore, the input that he receives what he hears from his immediate surrounding what his parents speak what his nanny speaks what his siblings speak, they are all the dependent on the context, the very context-dependent, no one is sitting in front of the child and breaking it down for him and giving it in a very structured way, like how it is given in schools when you learn languages. And therefore, we call the input, or the language that he hears around him is quite fuzzy and limited.

Now, what does the mind do? Mind has something called as the universal grammar or the language acquisition device. What the brain of the child does is from all these fuzzy, limited input that the child hears the brain does the role of a teacher there. What the teacher does in a second language classroom, the universal grammar does it for the child. It classifies nouns verbs, adjectives, it deconstructs the rules of grammar and helps understand the child the rules of the language that he is listening or hearing around him.

And therefore, with ample input, within 3 to 4 years, the child is able to come up with grammatically right sentences and what comes out the spoken language is known as output, which is grammatically structured, socially aware, and the language that we speak is called E-language, or the language that exists in society is called E-language. Whereas the language that the brain processes the language that the brain deconstructs is known as the I-language.

What is I-language? The language that is internal to us is called the internal language and the language that we speak. The language that exists in society is called the external language or E-language.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:51)

WHAT DOES CHILDRENS' LANGUAGE TELL YOU ?

- Crying stage → Babbling stage → Eight months → Ten months → Sixteen months
- Two and a half years → Three and a half years → Five years
- Stage one: 2½ years : Where my toy? (Simplification of adult English).
- Stage two: 3½ years : What your name is ? (Does not know where to put the auxiliary verb)
- Stage three : 5 years : Speaks with good approximation to adult grammar (negative sentence, past tense etc.)
- ☐ Children know much more than they imitate (construct grammatical patterns).
- ☐ They produce novel utterances, a proof for mental grammar.
- ☐ All of this comes from the menu of Universal Grammar



Now, having understood how language is acquired, Let us now move on to various stages of language acquisition. So, the earliest vocalization in a child is a crying stage. Next is the babbling stage. Usually from the sixth month where the child's produce a sounds like goo and boo, and from eighth month, the child starts babbling with intonation in response to what is being spoken. At the tenth month, babies start talking and one-word utterances.

At the tenth month, baby start talking one-word utterances like maa, paa, come. Usually, these words are all content words; they are not going to be functional words at all. That is, they are not going to be using prepositions there. They are either going to be nouns or verbs, you know names of their toys, or maybe directions or certain properties, that is their toys. At this stage, the child does not learn functional words like I said. So, the child is not going to use words like 'is' or 'to' or 'was', etcetera.

Similarly, the child will not use plural forms. For that matter, past tense. At sixteenth month, the vocabulary goes from 50 to 100 words, at two and a half the child puts together 2 or 3-word utterances. Example what book name or where my toy? This is simplification of adult grammar. Where my toy? So, the child is omitting the auxiliary verb "is".

The next stage that is around 3 and a half years the child ends up framing a sentence or a question like what your name is, the auxiliary verb is misplaced here. So, instead of placing it after the question word, which is 'what is your name', the child ends up asking 'what your name is'. And it is stage 3, which is around 5 years. Child speaks with good approximation with adult

grammar. The child can use negative sentences like 'I do not like that'. 'I think I do not like this' or, 'I went to the park and came back' which is past tense. So, the child is capable of using negative sentences and past tense; it is a good approximation to adult grammar at the age of 5.

So, with all this, what do you understand about children learning language or what is known as first language acquisition? So, here we are, we are not talking about second language learning we are talking about first language acquisition, how do children learn languages? That is the question that we are addressing here. So with this, we come to conclude that children know much more than what they imitate.

So, let us forget the behaviourist model. Language Learning is not all about imitation. Yes, of course, children do imitate but only to a certain degree. But after that, it is all the power of human brain. Human brain deconstructs from the input that it is receiving from the immediate environment understand the underlying rules of language. And once you supplement the brain with ample inputs, it eels grammatically structured output that is known as the E-language or the external language.

And all this is aided by what is known as a universal grammar or mental grammar. So, now armed with a good understanding of how language acquisition takes place in us, let us move to the topic, the Second Language Learner. So here, we are going to look at English as a second language.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:33)

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER

- Ma'am your name what ? / Your name is what ? (*Ma'am* , *Unga peru enna?*)
- Mother tongue influence
- Principle of Economy
- Inter-language : Form of learner language, used by children, is called 'interlanguage'. It is neither indicative of an impoverished version of language filled with errors, nor is it a language purely based on errors due to the first language interference. It is a language, governed by systematic rules and has a life of its own.



Now, I would like to talk about this, by citing an experience I have had in a school five years back when I was doing my fieldwork, I walked into a class, it was a first-grade class, and the child comes to me and asked me, ma'am, your name, what? At a peripheral level, if you analyze the sentence, if you look at the sentence, at the surface level, you feel this is a grammatically wrong sentence. Why? Because the child has missed auxiliary verb there 'is'. And the question word is at the end of the sentence. You do not ask 'ma'am? Your name what' but it is, what is your name, ma'am'.

But I urge you to look beyond that. Beyond the ungrammaticality. Her mother tongue is Tamil and in Tamil, if you want to ask someone, what is your name? You ask, Unga peru enna, the question word, what in Tamil is yena? And that comes at the end of the sentence? Or at the end of the question. So, it is Unga peru enna? So, she translates the structure or she transfers the structure of or the rules of question formation in her mother tongue to the second language that is English, and therefore she ends up saying Unga peru enna?

Another thing I would say is when she is asking this question Unga peru enna? What is important for us to notice here is that beyond the obvious and grammaticality the child transfers the rules of her mother tongue to the language that she is learning, that is her second language English. So, a lot of us complain, a lot of us feel that you know, our mother tongue is interfering with the second language that we are learning.

And therefore, a lot of times this phenomenon is also, you know, termed as mother tongue interference, I urge you to look at it in a different way. This is called mother tongue influence, do not feel that your mother tongue is stopping you from speaking, the mother tongue is aiding you to speak. It just shows that you have not provided ample inputs in that language. In the second language that you are learning, your brain has not completely figured out the rules of the second language that you are learning and therefore ends up borrowing the rules of the first language that you are comfortable with.

And in the process, rather than looking at it as interference, I would urge you to look at it as an aid rather than going blank. It is better that you, you ask Ma'am, your name is what are your name? Ma'am? Your name What? So, this kind of learner language or this kind, this form of learner language. This is very fluid because it keeps changing it is it is going to stay for a very little time, the more input you are going to provide, the more input the child is going to receive. The brain is going to figure out the rules, and then pick up the language, pick up the rules of the language and start using it without any difficulty.

So, this kind of language, linguists have given a term to that language, and that is called inter-language. So, try to look at inter-language is a very creative language that your brain is trying to supplement you with all the deficiencies, all the rules that you do not know, all the places that you would otherwise have stood blank, your brain is supplementing you with those rules, you know, that you are not quite aware of in your second language with that of the rules of your first language.

So, this kind of learners language used by children, or for that matter, any second language learner, it could be an adult as well. It is called inter-language. It is neither indicative of an impoverished version of language filled with errors. Nor is it a language purely based on errors due to the first language interference. It is a language governed by systematic rules and has a life of its own.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:14)

THE ONE AND ONLY MANTRA TO IMPROVE YOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

THE MORE THE INPUT, THE BETTER THE OUTPUT !



So with all this, what did you learn about language learning in use? While there can be hundreds of theories about language learning in use, but there is one undebatable language mantra that all of us agree on, "The more the input, the better the output", the more input you give, the more you expose yourself to language without effort, your brain will deconstruct the rules of the language that you are supplying it with and helps you come up with grammatically structured and grammatically accurate, grammatically right sentences.

Therefore, whatever be your target language, be it English or Arabic or Hindi or Tamil, anything be it any language. The more you expose yourself to the language, the better your output is going to be. So with that, we come to the end of the session. I hope you have had some learning through this module. I will see you with a different module on a different day. Until then, stay safe, take care. Bye.