

A Second Language Teaching Method Based on New Technology and Kinaesthetic Approach

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Abstract

Nowadays Second Language Acquisition is one of the most relevant topics in education, in fact teachers and researchers often debate what is the best method to teach an L2. In Italy the general opinion among educators, teachers and parents is that children should be exposed much more to the second language (English) but unfortunately the school hours dedicated to it are no more than three depending on the school grade. Consequently, Italian children are considered slow in acquiring the language despite their bright potential and what emerges is that they are extremely weak in speaking skills. In fact, usually at the end of primary school, after five years of foreign language exposure, they cannot carry on an A1/A2 conversation. What the linguist Noam Chomsky [1] has pointed out is that language acquisition requires two different features, the fact that not only the language is something innate in our brain but also it needs the experience in order to be developed. Having taken the experience as a basis of our experiment we tried to create a new teaching method for children based on the kinaesthetic approach, which was incorporated through particular body games, and the new technology which was included in the project thanks to an App whose aim was to let primary school children create educational games.

Keywords: SLA, ESL, Technology, Kinaesthetic approach.

1. Introduction

The aim of the current study is to present a different second language teaching method for children in which both new technology and kinaesthetic approach cooperate to let the students acquire English as a second language. Nowadays the methodologies involved in SLA are one of the most discussed topics in education and, since researchers and experts' interests are in the direction of new technology and especially in how much is worth using it with students of different grades, we tried to implement it in our experiment. We can often find teachers who use technology in their second language classrooms, but usually they propose to their pupils a passive approach instead of an active one. What emerges is that even though letting the technological power only to the teacher is easier and less chaotic, the results are not extremely relevant in terms of acquisition [2]. In fact, passive children are not fully involved in the classroom activities and the consequence is that a new stimulus ends in itself. For this reason, what we intended to do in our experiment was to create a teaching method in which children could be not only active in their learning process but also, they could acquire English through two different stimuli the technological and the kinaesthetic one. The paper is divided into two parts, in the first one we discuss the importance of new technology and there is an explanation about what we intended for kinaesthetic approach in the second part we focus our attention on the experiment design and the data collected.

2. Technology in language learning

Learning a language is a complex and long process which involves several skills such as phonetic, prosody, semantics and grammar. The common opinion is that children from early on until the critical period which is around the puberty have less difficulties in learning a foreign language while after the critical period our brain is considered slower in acquiring it. However, learners must use and practice L2 as much as they can and in fact most language teachers would agree that sometimes the communicative competence process is slow and difficult to reach especially because students have not many chances of practicing and using the language. Nowadays using technological devices in language learning let students have many more inputs than in the past in fact for example, listening, comprehension and speaking skills can be improved considerably. Carol A. Chapelle [3] underlines that "the study of every level of the linguistic system has changed because of technology" and in fact she explains that electronic communications, movies, videos and social networks help students in using a language and thanks to internet students have much more means. Nowadays while for teenagers and adults we have tested methods such as online courses, blended learning [4] and flipped classroom [5] for the children the literature appears much vaguer. Using technological devices



in a primary school is not easy above of all because it can happen that children let themselves carried away by enthusiasm of playing in a tablet or computer moreover for the teachers is easier to use an interactive whiteboard because she/he can control it instead of 20 iPad which are controlled by the children. However, including technology in classrooms is possible only if the activities are carefully planned and well organized because the aim of technology is to stimulate children in the right way or better to give them the chance of using much more the foreign language than in a traditional lesson. Nowadays, with tablet increasing there are many Apps that can be downloaded and especially in the classroom environment their use can be controlled and monitored by the teachers. In this experiment we used new technology through an Israeli App called TinyTap which was considered the most suitable for our project. This extremely intuitive app was used in two ways: by the teacher to create interactive slides or presentation for the grammar explanation and by the students to create different kind of exercises for their peers.

3. The kinaesthetic approach

The Kinaesthetic method is a learning approach in which students do physical activities in order to acquire concepts. The premise which we must consider is that everyone has its own intelligence such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic one. Moreover, the kinaesthetic approach follows the Edgar Gale's[6] cone of experience in which emerges that usually people remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say and hear, and 90% of what they do. According to the literature in Italian school is very common to use games and songs to teach or consolidate notions not only with nursery children but also 1st or 2nd grade children. The benefit of using the kinaesthetic learning approach is that, even though sometimes results to be noisier than the traditional one, it seems more effective and productive. Focusing our attention on language learning, singing songs, playing games and using body movements in general are extremely helpful to learn grammar and vocabulary and they help to acquire more confidence with L2. In our experiment we used kinaesthetic language games in which children produced grammar structures while they were moving their body so in few words each movement corresponded to a grammar structure or a simple word. During our experiment, we used several kinaesthetic games created or modified by the teacher in order to let the children consolidate the grammar acquired. The reason why during each lesson the teacher proposed a game before starting to use the iPad was due to the fact is that she realized that after them the children showed a much more fluency in using the grammar structures explained.

4. Experimental design and data

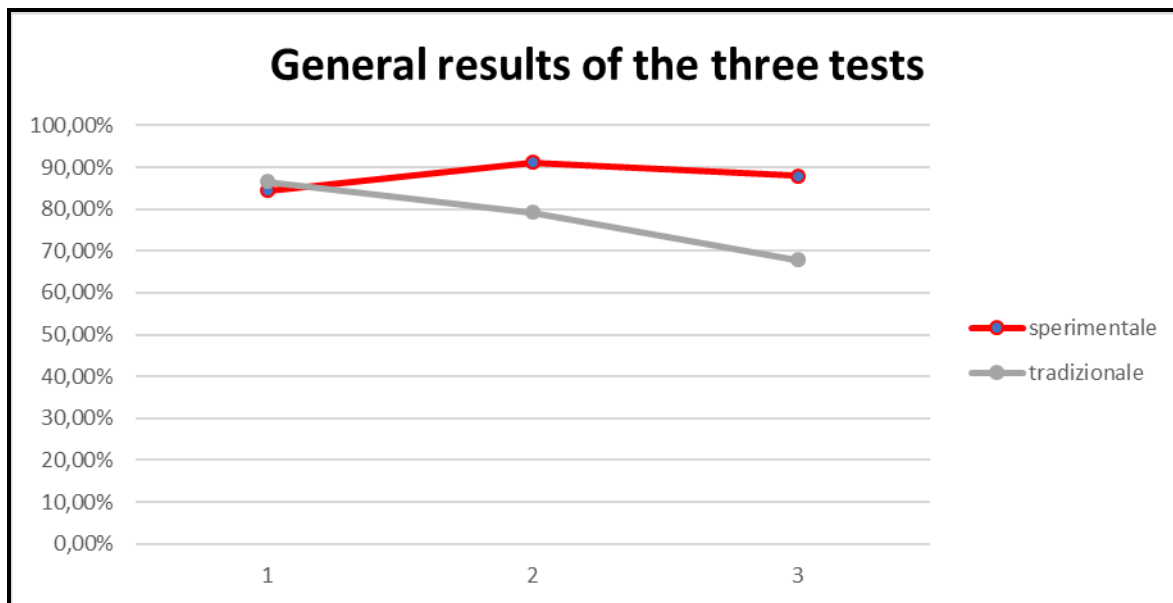
The experiment was planned in order to verify if in teaching English as a second language the new learning method based on new technology and kinaesthetic approach was more effective than the traditional teaching method. We decided to test 2nd grade Italian children and we had a control group of 20 children who were exposed to a traditional teaching method based on frontal lessons and an experimental group of 18 children who were exposed to the new teaching method. Both groups worked on two grammar structures "want+ noun" and "like+ing" and they did a total of ten lessons. The focus of the lesson was to learn how to produce affirmatives, negatives and interrogatives sentences with the two structures. In the first part they studied "want+to" and they did a written test in the 5th lesson, then they studied "like +ing" and in the 10th lesson they did a test which included the two structures involved in the whole experiment. In order to test the long-term memory, after three months they did a final test which included both structures. In order to understand better the experiment what we must consider is how each lesson (1hour) was structured:

Control group	Experimental group
Explanation Let the children make examples and repeat the structures Work on worksheets	Interactive explanation Kinaesthetic game Work on TinyTap

Table 1. Lesson plan for each group



The graph below shows the data that we collected during the experiment.



Graph 1 General results of the three tests: the graph shows the trends of the control group (grey line) and the experimental group (red line) in the three tests.

According to the results about the first test the children who followed the traditional method performed slightly better than the experimental group. This difference, even if it is minimal, is due to the fact that the experimental group was exposed not only to the Second Language Acquisition but also to the App programming so actually the experimental children had two different things to tackle at the same time. As it is shown from the graph in the second test about “To Like+ to want” there was a relevant change. In fact, while the control group got an average of 79,23% the experimental children reached an average of 91,18 %. This is because in the second test the experimental group got accustomed to the new second language teaching method. The Long-term memory test was the most relevant for its results. In fact, while the trend of the experimental group remained almost stable there was a significant decrease for the children who followed the traditional teaching method. According to these results we can state that the most useful second language teaching method is the experimental one which included both new technology and kinaesthetic approach. Even though at the very beginning the experimental group did not reach better results than the control group at the end they showed how much the experimental method resulted to be extremely effective and more based on acquisition than just learning. This confirms the idea that the more stimuli are provided in SLA the more and the easier is the process of acquiring a foreign language.

5. Conclusion

What emerged from this thesis is how much stimuli are fundamental in order to learn a foreign language and how the teaching methodologies are relevant in a language classroom. The present experiment showed that the experimental teaching method is more effective in comparison to the traditional one in fact, it leads to acquisition of the notions instead of just learn them as a short-term memory. In conclusion, working with very young children is not easy, and while well-planned kinaesthetic games work very well, introducing new technology in class and especially giving each child an electrical device is extremely risky if the teacher is not technologically competent. Moving forward with this line of research, it would be very interesting to test if the present method can be applied with older students and if the method should be modified in relation to the age of the participants.

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