

*The Implication of Subconscious Approach in Stimulating the English Language  
Knowledge for Interpreting-Majored Students*

Nhi Yen Ho, Nha Trang University, Vietnam

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the implication of the subconscious teaching approach in stimulating the English language knowledge for Interpreting-majored students. The researcher analyzed some relevant theories: Universal Grammar of Noam Chomsky and Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition. After examining these theories, a proposed subconscious teaching approach was developed to improve the situation of lacking English knowledge by some students in the Interpretation major. This study's method mostly follows the qualitative and quantitative approaches with 80 participants who are seniors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Nha Trang University, Vietnam. The study results revealed the whole picture of utilizing the subconscious approach. In stimulating English language knowledge for students. This could also contribute to further improvements in language skills in teaching.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Universal Grammar, Subconscious

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## **Introduction**

The typical challenges in interpretation crucially focus on the lack of competency in listening and speaking skills. From the observation of the researcher, however, Interpreting-majored students tend to be trained in the approaches mostly concentrating on developing interpreting skills. Practice, as a result, obviously works on the aspect of brain plasticity, and the learners can certainly feel the familiarization of repetition, but some of them hardly possess a solid foundation of language knowledge. Admittedly, the constitution of fluency and accuracy in language performance necessarily requires a language base. To consolidate language knowledge playing an irreplaceable role in the language performance of interpreters, the writer examined the subconscious mind by researching its features combined with the Universal Grammar theories and some second language acquisition hypotheses of Stephen Krashen. The specific implication of this article concentrates on students in English interpreting classes in Vietnam.

## **Literature Review**

### **Subconscious Mind**

Pierre Janet – a famous neurologist and psychologist – introduced the concept of the subconscious mind in one of his works in the late 1880s with the definition concerning this term as a “powerful awareness” located underneath the conscious mind (Ellenberger, 1970). In 1893, Sigmund Freud also mentioned the subconscious mind in his writing as a layer, which could not link to the consciousness. However, in 1990, Freud described the human mind by using the topographical model of three levels, which were “conscious mind”, “preconscious mind” and “unconscious mind”, and he refused the term subconscious mind. Since then, the subconscious mind and preconscious mind have been confused and they are often overlapped. After Sigmund Freud’s work, Latham, Stajkovic and Locke (2010) repeated the subconscious mind in their article, and they believed that it could operate “without intention, awareness and conscious guidance”. According to Yogachara – a philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism, the subconscious mind is called *Ālayavijñāna* whose function is a “storehouse – consciousness” (Berzin, 2013). In conclusion, from the mentioned concepts, the subconscious mind can save all types of information received from the senses.

### **The Universal Grammar**

Universal Grammar was mentioned as the “system of categories, mechanisms and constraints shared by all human languages and considered to be innate” (Chomsky, 1986). White (2020) also noted in her book that UG theories mostly focused on the acquisition process of language and the language constituency. Baker (1979) referred to UG as a theory consisting of the content regarding the natural device of language learning in the human mind. The sense of realizing the incorrectness existed in the sentence production was considered an obvious capability.

Following this, it can be inferred that the real essence of UG is the existence of an innate device in the human mind. Throughout the development of UG, lots of scholars have been also carrying out numerous studies regarding the relationship between UG and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Chomsky (1980) asserted that “language faculty” might be a “mental organ”, proving that language itself can be acquired naturally in every human. Language acquisition can be considered the development of the mental organ of language

through language experiences. Universal Grammar certainly follows the natural approach of language forming, leading to a perfect combination of second language acquisition and the innate elements existing in the human mind.

## **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

In the history of linguistics, language acquisition was first explained by Skinner (1957); however, it was criticized by Noam Chomsky. Particularly, he assured that language could not be learnt through “reinforcement” since the “innate” elements always existed in human development. Chomsky continued this study by inventing the theory of *Universal Grammar* (1965). In 1967 and 1972, Pit Corder and Larry Selinker continued this trend of research by proposing theories concerning “learners’ errors” and “interlanguage”. The history continued with some hypotheses of Stephen Krashen – a key scholar in the field of SLA. He gave a concept of SLA as a similar process to the stages of acquiring language of children (1981), and he mentioned the importance existence of “input” in establishing the core language knowledge deleting the feeling of imperfection in language performance. Krashen (1982) determined that language acquisition and language learning were two separate stages, which possessed the features of “consciousness” and “subconsciousness” in each process. However, Krashen received lots of criticism from other scholars, who did not approve of the necessity of language acquisition, and they mostly did not concentrate on the intrinsic power of the learners’ minds but the language teaching. Since then, the two concepts of “consciousness” and “unconsciousness” have become one of the most controversial issues in second language learning.

## **The Comprehensible Input and the Natural Order Hypotheses**

In 1985, Stephen Krashen proposed a Monitor Model consisting of five hypotheses (*The acquisition-learning-learning hypothesis, The Natural Order hypothesis, The Monitor hypothesis, The Input hypothesis, and The Affective Filter hypothesis*). In this section, the Comprehensible Input and the Natural Order hypotheses are analyzed.

The comprehensible input of Stephen Krashen is a theory of second language acquisition that states that learners acquire a language when they understand messages or texts that are slightly above their current level of competence. According to Krashen, comprehensible input is the necessary and sufficient condition for language learning, and it occurs when learners are focused on the meaning rather than the form of the language. Krashen also proposes that there is a natural order of acquisition that is independent of the order of teaching and that learners have an internal monitor that can correct their errors based on their learned knowledge of the language. The Comprehensible Input is one of the most successful hypotheses of Stephen Krashen in the research approach of SLA. In a study by Krashen in 1982, he inferred the process of SLA with the necessity of “comprehensible input”. This has the power as a potential lever in helping one person acquire a language with a well-founded approach. He assured that language was only acquired through the understanding process (Krashen, 1985), proving the role of comprehensible input was inevitable. In his hypothesis, he mentioned “i” as the current level of the learners and “i + 1” as the level that the learners aimed to achieve. This explained the reason for creating an “i + 1” input to build the learners’ language acquisition processes.

The natural order hypothesis is a theory of second language acquisition proposed by Stephen Krashen in 1977. It states that learners acquire grammatical structures in a predictable and

fixed order, regardless of their native language, the age of acquisition, or the amount of exposure. The hypothesis is based on evidence from studies of learners' errors and developmental stages in various languages. According to Krashen, the natural order hypothesis reflects the innate and universal principles of language learning that are independent of external factors. Schmidt (1990) explained in their writing that the Natural Order hypothesis emphasized on the order of acquiring linguistic patterns of the language learners. Krashen (1987) proposed a table of illustrating the order of language acquisition of language learners as follows:

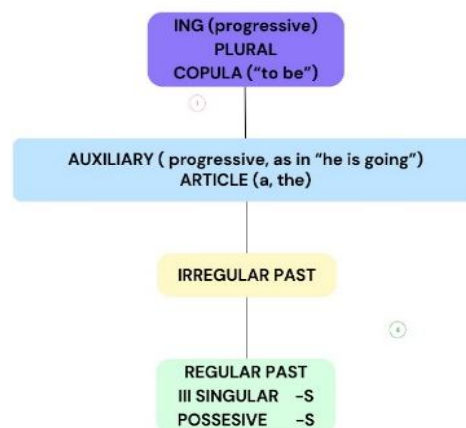


Figure 1: Natural order of language acquisition

### Interpretation and Second Language Acquisition

Interpretation or Interpreting implies the most common way of deciphering correspondence between hearing people, who convey in communicated in language, and people who impart in gesture-based communication.

The process of interpretation consists of the specific stages existing in language production. Kormos (2014) clarified these as *conceptualization*, *formulation*, *articulation* and *self-monitoring*. Students, therefore, cannot have good skills in interpreting if they do not possess a solid foundation in language. Nhi (2017) presented diagrams concerning the processes of interpreting from English to Vietnamese and vice versa. She mentioned the stages of *conceptualization* and *formulation* after “transferring” language. This means that the interpreters should reach the level of fluency when they want to achieve perfect language understanding and speaking skills while interpreting. It is evident that before students start their major as interpreters, they have to be trained carefully in four basic language skills (listening, speaking, writing, and reading). Most teachers tend to focus on “how to teach to help the learners perform the language well” rather than “how to teach to help the learners acquire the language well”. The researcher concluded that the lack of acquisition leads to a lack of foundation. Therefore, it will be impossible for interpreting students, who still haven’t possessed enough language knowledge during the basic skills training, to achieve their perfect language performances.

## **The Subconscious Approach Model**

### ***The Equilateral Triangle of LRD***

LRD stands for *listening, reading and discussing*. These kinds of activities establish a solid foundation for language development. From the writer's perspective, the equilateral triangle of LRD can help instructors be flexible in designing activities. The instructors in Interpreting classes, therefore, can conduct discussion activities inside the classrooms, while reading & listening activities will become the learners' homework.

LRD equilateral triangle possesses the power of the preconscious. In fact, in this writing, the researcher wants to emphasize the status in the middle of the "unconscious" and "conscious" mind when acquiring language. With LRD, the learners can have opportunities to develop their language mysteriously without awareness. Regarding *Listening*, students can absorb the "tunes" of language, which includes the pronunciation and the familiarization of sounds. At the same pace of language acquisition, *Reading* can establish the "bone" of language consisting of a vast number of vocabularies and grammatical patterns. *Reading* and listening activities, therefore, can help promote the neuroplasticity. With *discussion*, this factor is the connection of *Reading* and *Listening*. It means that when receiving the "input", the learners should have the opportunity to practise with the "output" because, without the appearance of this practice, language performance hardly occurs.

### ***Designing Reading & Listening Activities***

While the success of an English–Vietnamese interpreting process crucially focuses on language understanding, the process of interpreting from Vietnamese to English requires a solid background of general language knowledge. The instructors should design activities for students to practice at home, and check their results.

Reading activities should concentrate on solving the problem of how to read rather than the desire to understand. By concentrating on this feature, the instructors can think of an approach, which emphasizes two steps of reading including "*general reading*" and "*close reading*" (Peter Newmark, 1988). In the aspect of *Listening*, interpreting requires flexibility in understanding. This element needs the familiarization of sounds and the realization of words. When examining these two skills, the writer concluded that it is extremely necessary to connect *Listening* and *Reading* activities. The instructors can design these activities by following the topics that were prepared at the beginning of the courses. In the listening activities, the instructors have to focus on developing "note-taking" skills because it can promote some sub-skills in practising interpreting, and the number of times that students can listen is also an aspect of research that the instructors should consider.

However, the analysis above may lead to one question: should all the listening and reading materials be only in English to help Vietnamese students acquire the English language perfectly or should they be in both two languages (English and Vietnamese language)? From the researcher's study, because of the particular features of interpreting students, which require the learners to be fluent in both the source language and target language, the appearance of English and Vietnamese materials in the process of forming the language foundation is necessary. Nevertheless, Vietnamese materials should only exist in *Reading* because listening to the Vietnamese language is quite superabundant in language acquisition. Although the students are Vietnamese, reading in the Vietnamese language is also a

supporting activity for being flexible in using vocabulary when interpreting English to Vietnamese.

### ***Discussion – The Bridge to Success***

The bridge that can connect the two hemispheres of *Listening* and *Reading* is the role of discussion, and this activity is in the classrooms. The discussion is considered language immersion because it can reflect the language performance of one person. The most crucial points that an instructor should remember are the type of discussion and how a discussion goes appropriately. In the writer's opinion, to have an effective discussion, which can promote the ability of language performance of interpreting students, the discussion should be in a formal style. There is a fact that working as an interpreter will be like acting on a stage, and an interpreter will be a speaker in using both source language and target language. It is, therefore, necessary to improve public speaking skills for the learners. Furthermore, the activities of speaking in the discussion can help the learners recall their memories concerning the "input" and also apply the "input" to specific contexts of language performance. Without discussion activity, the instructors and the learners cannot evaluate any success in the process of establishing language core. From the experience of the researcher, the small form of panel discussion may be effective because the learners can improve their public speaking skills and also their abilities to be flexible in using language. Discussion, therefore, is likely a tool whose function is bridging the language's bone and language's soul together, and it also creates a lever promoting the ability of language performance.

What students perform in a discussion can be seen as the data from the area of the preconscious mind. However, different people are going to have a different view on this aspect because they believe that students learn everything from *Listening* and *Reading*, so they will store the knowledge in the area of the "conscious mind" not in the area of nearly "unconscious", and this perspective of ideology mind leads to a controversial pattern. Admittedly, it is extremely hard to give evidence of "consciousness" or "preconsciousness", but the writer can give her points of view on that, focusing on the memories of the learners. When the instructors require students to read or to listen at home, they do not concentrate on obligating the students to remember everything. If the learners do not remember anything, which process has happened in their brains? "Consciousness" means that you consciously try to remember and apply everything in the discussion process; however, students just naturally absorb the language. Therefore, the "preconscious" approach is relevant to the discussion process.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to investigate the effects of implementing the subconscious approach in stimulating language knowledge for English-interpreting major students, so the following research questions were proposed:

- How is the subconscious approach applied in the Interpreting teaching process?
- Can the subconscious approach be applied in the Interpreting teaching procedure?
- Is the subconscious approach effective in stimulating language knowledge for Interpreting-major students?

## **Participants**

This study focused on one main group of 80 juniors coming from two Interpreting classes at Nha Trang University. These learners passed Interpreting 1 (according to the program of English-language major at Nha Trang University, the students have to complete 03 compulsory Interpreting subjects namely Interpreting 1, Interpreting 2 and Interpreting 3), so they certainly possess intermediate English language level. However, once teaching in the current circumstance, the researcher realized that their English language foundation encountered a large number of issues. This led to the decision to implement the new teaching approach to improving their language levels.

## **Instrumentation**

The study followed the qualitative approach in collecting the research data. In detail, two research instruments were utilized.

### ***Pre-test & Final Test***

Before applying the subconscious approach in the teaching process, the researcher designed a pre-test to evaluate the level of the participants to get the most practical results regarding their features. The test required the students to get involved in solving some relevant interpreting tasks, and these tasks also reflected the language levels of the learners.

After being taught by using the subconscious approach, the participants were then tested by a similar test with quite different content to evaluate the effects of the approach.

### ***Semi-structured Interview***

The researcher designed two sets of semi-structured interviews to get the participants' perspectives concerning the effects of the subconscious approach in helping them consolidate their language knowledge.

The first set of interviews was conducted before using the subconscious approach. The questions were as follows:

- What is your English language level?
- Do you think you have enough language knowledge to perform well in the interpreting process?

The second set of interviews was used after implementing the subconscious approach in the teaching process. The questions include:

- Can you feel the improvement of your English language knowledge?
- Can you feel the improvement in your language performance in the Interpreting process?
- Did you encounter any difficulties in being taught by implementing some subconscious-approach activities?
- Do you think that the new approach in Interpreting the teaching process is useful for your Interpreting learning?

## Findings and Results

### Findings

#### *The Pre-test Results*

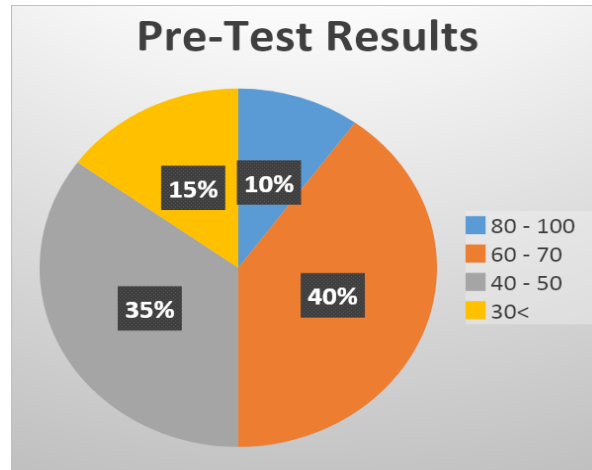


Figure 2: Pre-test Results

The pie chart given indicates the percentage of the participants' pre-test results. From the chart, it can be seen that most of the learners achieved scores from 60 to 70 (accounting for 40%), and the second position belonged to the group of results ranging from 40 to 50 (35%). The smallest percentage of the results was the group of 80 to 100 (10%), and 15% of the learners received scores below 30.

#### *The Final Test Results*

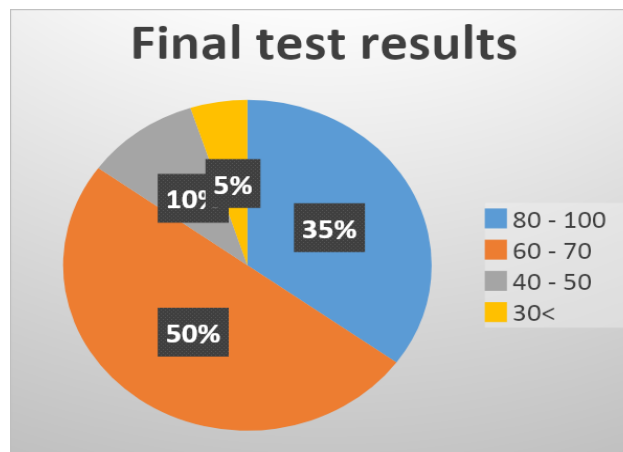


Figure 3: Final Test Results

The pie chart illustrates the percentage of scores received by the participants in the final test. In general, the largest percentage of results was the group of 60 to 70 (50%), followed by the group of 80 to 100 (35%). 10% of the learners got from 40 to 50, and 5% of them possessed scores below 30.



### ***Results of the First Set of the Semi-structured Interview***

Being asked about the level of their English language, most of the participants responded that they were at the B2 level, and only 10 students admitted their levels as C1. In the second question, 60 learners confessed that they had encountered a large number of difficulties in dealing with the interpreting process due to the lack of English language foundation. The other 20 participants expressed their ideas regarding their English language level confidently, and they clarified that what they needed to practice was all about the interpreting skills, not the language itself.

### ***Results of the Second Set of the Semi-structured Interview***

In the first question concerning the effects or improvement after being instructed by the subconscious approach, 60 participants could feel the changes in their language foundation, but the other 20 of them said that they could not find anything. The second question investigated the language knowledge in the participants' interpreting processes. In detail, 65 students could consolidate their language knowledge, while 15 of them could not reach their targets. Additionally, the participants were also required to indicate information regarding the difficulties they encountered during the whole stage of getting involved with the subconscious approach, and 46% of them responded that the new teaching approach was quite challenging. The last question motivated students to provide their general comments on the effectiveness of the subconscious approach in learning Interpreting, and 60% of the participants agreed that their interpreting skills were improved significantly.

## **Discussion**

### ***The Results of the Pre-test***

The results in findings showed that most of the participants were at an intermediate level of interpreting skills when participating in the pre-test because precisely 40% of them achieved scores from 60 to 70. Honestly, the results were beyond the researcher's expectations due to the fact of her observation of her students' language performances during their learning processes. In another aspect of the data collection, the circumstance seems to be reflected in the group of students receiving scores from 40 to 50. It revealed the fact that the students could not perform their language level clearly due to some reasons. The first assumption is that the students are not familiar with the knowledge in the test since they are at the beginning of the course. The researcher then re-examined the test content, and she found out that its content was not the problem. The test content mostly focused on language knowledge rather than interpreting skills, proving that the students could perform without the background knowledge regarding the interpreting course. As a result, the researcher concluded that the participants were at the intermediate language level. In terms of the group of scores below 30, 15% of them received the mentioned results, proving that some students encountered various issues in their learning. In general, although most of the participants achieved intermediate results in their tests, this can also reflect that the learners have still experienced some language problems due to the results' subjective features.

### ***The First Set of the Semi-structured Interview***

The students were required to clarify their English language level in the first question, and their responses were quite similar compared to the pre-test results. This revealed that the

students were precisely positioned at the intermediate language level. Additionally, the number of participants who chose C1 as their level was only 10, accounting for a small percentage of the high-skilled language performance, proving that there was a gap in language level among the participants.

These 10 learners could also become good samples of experiencing the subconscious approach in the teaching process, although the main aim of this teaching method mostly concentrated on language learners with a low language knowledge background. Following this, the participants continued to admit the difficulties in learning Interpreting, which was influenced by the lack of language knowledge. Thanks to the participants' features, the researcher could implement the approach to improve the learners' foundation. One of the most typical participants' responses was that they could feel the lack of language knowledge, and they even tried to practice interpreting skills to change their level, but nothing was improved. Others also confessed that if they had carefully learned language skills, they would have changed their English levels. The students realized their weaknesses; however, they did not know the best solutions for their improvements. Hence, it shows that if the learners lack their language knowledge, they hardly improve or learn interpreting perfectly. Additionally, it can also be concluded that interpreting practice cannot change their language performance if they do not know their appropriate training or practice solutions. Fortunately, the participants tended to have the awareness to realize their weaknesses. As a result, their awareness of learning could help them achieve better results in learning with the subconscious approach. Once they know that they need to build their language foundation, they certainly can control the most precise track to follow. In the first part of the interview, the researcher also received a typical response, and the answer was beyond the researcher's expectation since she had not thought of a situation in which the learners could know what they needed to improve. From the response, the researcher can conclude that these students possessed some significant language achievements, proving that they could easily improve their language levels but were not trained appropriately.

### ***The Second Set of the Semi-structured Interview***

Regarding the improvement of general language knowledge, although 60 students could feel the changes, this feature could not reflect the positive outcomes of the subconscious approach. The finding, therefore, is quite neutral, which means that it cannot help the researcher conclude the influence on affecting language knowledge. In the improvement of language performance in the learners' interpreting process, 65 of them received good outcomes of the new teaching method, proving the absurd features in the results. Some of them could feel positive differences in their interpreting processes, but they could not feel the changes in their basic language skills. Did they indicate precise results or did they understand themselves clearly? The assumption can be inferred that they could not control or they could not manage their language improvement. They received some changes in their language levels, but they could not realize their real features. In some responses, they assured that their speaking skill improved dramatically, proving that the most influential language skill in this case could be the oral communication aspect. In the next question, the difficulties concerning the new teaching approach were investigated. 46% of the participants asserted that they met some difficulties. In the response, the students mentioned the teaching requirements inferring that the researcher should consider the issues of instructions. From the response, the researcher could "feel" that the learners certainly encountered various problems in their language foundation since they could not complete the basic requirements relating to some simple reading and listening activities. The researcher also examined the features of the

activities that she designed in her classes, and she found out that only 10% of them should have been reconsidered. As a result, the research could clarify the levels of the learners and also intended to adjust the difficulties in the lessons to reduce the gaps in their learning processes. The subsequent question focused on their interpreting skills. More than half of them agreed that they could be more successful in conducting their interpreting processes.

From the analysis, some conclusions can be made. The first glance at the interview revealed that they were quite similar, and they tended to investigate some similar aspects at the same time. The purpose of creating some relevant issues in the questions could activate the real features of the learners. If the participants possessed some similar points in their responses, this indicated the consistency of their thoughts. In contrast, if they had different ideas concerning the issues, they certainly created fake results. In this case, the results' features seem quite unreliable. This implies that the learners themselves may hide something, or they do not manage and understand their English language level in their interpreting learning process.

### ***The Results of the Final Test***

The results of the final test reflected that the learners received better scores compared to the ones in the pre-test. The percentage of the group from 60 – 70 and 80 – 100 increased significantly, proving the changes in their skill and language levels. However, this feature was not objective because, during the whole semester, the participants also had to get involved in special interpreting skill training. Hence, it might have influenced their improvement. To get a more precise outcome, the researcher compared the results of the tests and she realized that the participants could receive some good impacts from the new teaching approach through the appearances of their feelings.

### **Conclusion**

Through the findings, the researcher could conclude that the subconscious approach itself is powerful since it already touches and changes the root of the problems in the language performance of the students. In particular, speaking skills can be considered one of the most affected and improved language skills that the participants could gain during the implementation of the teaching approach. The equilateral triangle LRD creating neuroplasticity existing in the approach can be considered a “lever” in smoothing the process of language acquisition. When analyzing and applying this approach to the real circumstances of each class, the instructors need to have a good evaluation of their student's language abilities. In detail, they should base their teaching on these features to design appropriate useful and meaningful activities to help the learners reach the expected targets. More importantly, it is also necessary to examine the activities before instructing the students to get involved due to the fact that each learner will experience the knowledge and abilities differently, leading to the influence on their learning outcomes. In addition, although the subconscious approach mostly affected the speaking skills of the learners, it did not mean that other language skills were not improved. From the features, the researcher has to be more flexible in discovering various aspects of the learners and start to design the teaching approach appropriately. This approach will be examined and developed to erase the gaps in the language knowledge of the learners in Interpreting classes and also in other language classes.

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