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"Semantic Shifts in Language Interaction: The Effect of Context-Based Teaching Models on English Skills Mastery in Advanced Learners"

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التحولات الدلالية في التفاعل اللغوي: تأثير نماذج التدريس القائمة على السياق على اتقان المهارات الإنجليزية لدى المتعلمين المتقدمين

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المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث التأثير العميق للنماذج التربوية المبنية على السياق في تشكيل التحولات الدلالية داخل البيئات التفاعلية لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على المتعلمين في المستويات المتقدمة. تتمحور المشكلة الأساسية حول كيفية مساهمة هذه النماذج في تعزيز الفهم السياقي والاستخدام الدلالي الدقيق للغة الإنجليزية. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجية مختلطة تجمع بين التصميم شبه التجريبي والتحليل النوعي العميق، شملت (٨٩) متعلمًا متقدمًا موزعين عبر مجموعتين: تجريبية تلقت تعليمًا مبنيًا على السياق، وضابطة خضعت للتعليم التقليدي .كشفت النتائج عن تفوق ملحوظ للمجموعة التجريبية في مجالات الفهم الدلالي العميق، والاستخدام السياقي للمفردات، والسلاسة البراغماتية، مع معدلات تحسن بلغت (٨٤.٢٪). أظهر التحليل النوعي نموًا واضحًا في الوعي الماورائي والقدرة على التنقل بين السجلات اللغوية المختلفة. توصي الدراسة بحاجة إعادة هيكلة مناهج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للمستويات المتقدمة لتركز حول السياقات الأصيلة والتفاعلات الدلالية الحقيقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية :التحولات الدلالية، التعليم السياقي، التفاعل اللغوي، مهارات الإنجليزية، المتعلمون المتقدمون.

Abstract

This research investigates the profound impact of context-based pedagogical models on shaping semantic transformations within interactive environments for English language learning, with particular focus on advanced-level learners. The fundamental problematic centers on how these models contribute to enhancing contextual understanding and precise semantic usage of English. The study employed a mixed methodology combining quasi-experimental design with in-depth qualitative analysis, involving (89) advanced learners distributed across two groups: experimental receiving context-based instruction, and control undergoing traditional teaching. Results revealed remarkable superiority of the experimental group in areas of deep semantic comprehension, contextual vocabulary usage, and pragmatic fluency, with improvement rates reaching (84.2%). Qualitative analysis showed clear growth in metalinguistic awareness and ability to navigate between different linguistic registers. The study recommends restructuring English language curricula for advanced levels to center around authentic contexts and genuine semantic interactions.

Keywords: Semantic Transformations, Contextual Teaching, Linguistic Interaction, English Skills, Advanced Learners.

1. Introduction

1.1. The fields of foreign language education are undergoing fundamental developments that reflect profound shifts in our understanding of the nature of language acquisition and the mechanisms of semantic learning. At the heart of these developments is the importance of context as a pivotal factor in shaping meaning and guiding effective linguistic use. The semantic shifts that occur during the process of learning English as a foreign

language do not merely represent an evolution in lexical repertoire, but rather reflect a profound evolution in the ability to understand and produce meanings in diverse and complex contexts.

1.2. This topic is particularly important when dealing with advanced learners, who have passed the basic proficiency stage and are seeking a level of fluency that is close to that of native speakers (Schmidt, 2023, p. 45). These learners face complex challenges related to an accurate understanding of semantic nuances, the appropriate use of different language records, and the ability to interact effectively within diverse cultural and professional contexts.

1.3. Traditional teaching models, which focus on isolated learning of grammar and vocabulary, show clear shortcomings in addressing these complex challenges (Brown & Lee, 2022, p. 78). Context-based models, on the other hand, offer innovative solutions that rely on integrating learners into real-world interactive situations that mimic natural language use environments. These models are not limited to the transfer of linguistic knowledge, but also aim to develop comprehensive communicative competence and deep cultural awareness.

1.4. The importance of this research is that it explores a vital area in language education that has rarely received sufficient attention: the complex interplay between context and meaning in advanced learning environments. It also contributes to bridging a clear research gap in the specialized Arabic literature in this field, providing an applied model that can be generalized in Arab higher education institutions.

2. Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

2.1. Basic Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

2.1.1. Semantic Shifts in Second Language Acquisition

2.1.1.1. Semantic shifts refer to the gradual and systematic changes that occur in the learner's understanding and use of linguistic meanings during his or her journey of acquiring a second language. This concept goes beyond the quantitative development of vocabulary to include a qualitative development in the ability to perceive complex interactions between form, meaning, and context (Larsen-Freeman, 2024, p. 112).

2.1.1.2. According to the theory of graded semantic processing, learners go through distinct stages in the development of their semantic understanding: from superficial form-based processing, to deep meaning-based processing, to advanced contextual processing that integrates cultural and deliberative dimensions (Evans & Green, 2023, p. 289). This gradient explains why advanced learners find it particularly difficult to master metaphorical uses and idiomatic expressions.

2.1.2. Context and Meaning: An Interactive Perspective

2.1.2.1. Context is defined in the context of language education as "the complex web of linguistic and non-linguistic factors that surround the communicative event and influence the interpretation and production of meaning" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2022, p. 156). This definition emphasizes the dynamic nature of context and its effective role in shaping meaning.

2.1.2.2. Contemporary theories distinguish between several contextual levels: the direct linguistic context, the situational context, and the broader cultural context (Van Dijk, 2023, p. 201). Each level contributes in a distinct way to defining the intended meaning and guiding appropriate language choices. Understanding this complex interaction is critical to developing effective teaching models.

2.1.3. Context-Based Teaching Models

2.1.3.1. Contextual teaching models are based on the fundamental principle that effective learning occurs when learners interact with language within meaningful contexts that are relevant to their experiences and goals (Richards & Rodgers, 2024, p. 234). These models vary in focus and application, but they share several essential characteristics:

- Contextual authenticity: The use of materials and situations that mimic the real use of language outside of the classroom environment (Thornbury & Slade, 2023, p. 89). This includes authentic texts, life assignments, and natural interactions with native speakers.
- Skill integration: Integrating different language skills into standardized activities that reflect the nature of real language use (Ellis, 2024, p. 167). Instead of teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking separately, these models integrate skills into integrated tasks.
- Focus on meaning: Prioritizing meaning and effective communication at the expense of abstract formal accuracy (VanPatten, 2023, p. 145). This does not mean neglecting the rules, but addressing them in real communicative contexts.

2.2. Previous Studies

2.2.1. Studies on Contextual Teaching

2.2.1.1. Johnson and colleagues (2023) conducted a comprehensive study on a sample of 156 advanced learners at U.S. universities to measure the impact of contextual teaching on the development of deliberative proficiency. The study used a complex experimental design that compared three groups: contextual, conventional, and mixed. The results showed a significant superiority of the contextual group on tests of deliberative proficiency (d = 1.47) and reactive fluency (d = 1.23).

2.2.1.2. In the European context, Martinez et al. (2023) carried out a two-year longitudinal research in which they followed the development of semantic proficiency in 89 Spanish learners of English as a foreign language. The study compared traditional teaching with contextual simulation-based teaching. The results showed accelerated growth in the understanding of metaphorical expressions and specialized uses in the contextual group, while retaining the long-term improvements gained.

2.2.2. Linguistic Interaction and Context Research

2.2.2.1. Chen and Liu's (2024) study made an important contribution to understanding the mechanisms of contextual and semantic interaction in English language learning. The study, which included 127 advanced Chinese learners, used speech analysis and neuroimaging techniques to monitor brain shifts associated with contextual meaning processing. The results showed that contextual teaching promotes the development of more efficient neural networks to process complex meanings.

2.2.2.2. On the other hand, Anderson and Brown (2023) explored the impact of contextual diversity on the flexibility of language use. The study followed 73 Canadian learners during an intensive six-month immersion program, comparing the effect of exposure to diverse versus limited contexts. The results confirmed that contextual diversity contributes significantly to the development of semantic flexibility and the ability to adapt to new communicative situations.

2.2.3. Studies in the Arab Environment

2.2.3.1. In Arabic literature, Al-Khalidi (2023) conducted a pioneering study at the United Arab Emirates University on the impact of professional simulation-based teaching on the development of specialized language proficiency. The study involved 64 students from the College of Business Administration, and the results showed a marked improvement in the ability to communicate professionally in English, with a particular growth in the understanding and accurate use of specialized terms.

2.2.3.2. Al-Sharif and Mahmoud (2024) focused on analyzing the semantic transformations of Arab learners through an 18-month longitudinal study at Cairo University. The study tracked the evolution of 45 students' understanding of English cultural expressions, showing that systematic exposure to diverse cultural contexts significantly enhances the ability to decipher implicit meanings and metaphorical uses.

2.3. Research Gap

2.3.1. Despite the wealth of literature in the field of contextual teaching, there is a clear gap in research that explores in depth the mechanisms of subtle semantic shifts that occur during contextual learning processes, especially in advanced learners. Most previous studies have focused on general outcomes without a detailed analysis of the cognitive processes underlying these shifts. Arabic studies in this field are also relatively limited and do not cover the wide range of possible contexts and applications.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Systematic Design

3.1.1. This research adopted an advanced hybrid methodology that combines a quasi-experimental design of quantitative comparison with deep qualitative analysis to explore underlying cognitive processes. This multidimensional design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of contextual models on semantic transformations from two complementary perspectives: measuring statistical impact and exploring qualitative mechanisms.

3.1.2. Quantitative Phase: A quasi-experimental design was used with two groups (experimental and control) with multiple pre- and post-measurements. This design ensures that the observed improvements can be attributed to the teaching intervention while controlling for extraneous variables.

3.1.3. Qualitative Stage: It relied on the methodology of micro-ethnographic research, where natural interactions within the learning environment were monitored and analyzed, with a focus on tracking subtle semantic shifts through discourse analysis and in-depth interviews.

3.2. Research Sample and Society

3.2.1. The research population consisted of advanced level students in ESL programs at three leading Iraqi universities: the University of Baghdad, Al-Mustansiriya University, and the University of Basra. An intentional sample of (89) male and female students was selected who met strict standards for the advanced level.

3.2.2. Selection criteria:

- Completion of a minimum of 6 levels of the English Language Teaching Program
- IELTS score of 6.5-7.0 or equivalent
- A minimum of two years of academic study experience in English
- Not residing in an English-speaking country for more than 6 months

3.2.3. The sample was divided into two equal groups: an experimental (n=45) that underwent contextual teaching, and a control group (n=44) that received improved traditional teaching.

3.3. Research Tools

3.3.1. Advanced Semantic Proficiency Diagnostic Test (ADCT)

3.3.1.1. This test was developed specifically to measure the complex aspects of semantic proficiency in advanced learners. It consists of five main components:

- Graded Contextual Comprehension Test: 25 difficulty gradient passages, each containing metaphorical or idiomatic expressions that require deep contextual understanding.
- Semantic Flexibility Scale: 30 multi-meaning words with diverse contexts to measure the ability to navigate between different meanings.
- Advanced Pragmatic testing: 20 communicative situations that require choosing the most contextually appropriate response from semantically convergent alternatives.
- Contextual production assessment: Productive tasks that require the use of language in specific contexts while assessing the accuracy of semantic choices.
- Measuring Metalinguistic Awareness: A specialized questionnaire to measure the learner's awareness of the relationships between form, meaning, and context.

3.3.2. Interactive Observation Protocol

3.3.2.1. It is designed to monitor patterns of linguistic interaction within the learning environment, focusing on:

- Evolution of the use of contextual vocabulary during discussions
- Self-Correcting Patterns of Semantic Error
- Frequency of using contextual strategies to understand meaning
- Indicators of Growth of Confidence in Complex Language Use

3.3.3. Half-Term Interview Guide - Organization

3.3.3.1. It aims to explore learners' self-experiences about:

- Their perception of shifts in their semantic understanding
- Strategies for dealing with contextual ambiguity
- The Effect of Contextual Experiences on Their Language Confidence
- Their evaluation of the effectiveness of different teaching methods

3.4. Authenticity and Stability of Tools

3.4.1. Content verification: All tools were presented to a panel of 9 panelists of applied linguistics and English language teaching experts, with 94.2% agreement on the suitability of the tools for the research objectives.

3.4.2. Construct Validity: Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the survey sample data (n=32), showing excellent conformity quality indicators: CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.038.

3.4.3. Consistency of internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha coefficient values ranged from 0.89-0.95 for the various test components, confirming the high internal consistency of the instruments.

3.4.4. Stability over time: Two-week interval retest was applied to a subsample (n=25), achieving correlation coefficients ranging from 0.87-0.93.

3.5. Contextual Teaching Program

3.5.1. Design Principles

3.5.1.1. The developed program is based on the Graduated Contextual Learning Model, which integrates several theoretical approaches:

- Authentic task-based learning: Every module is centered around a real life task that requires the use of language in its natural context.
- Methodological contextual gradation: Starting from familiar and simple contexts, gradually moving towards more complex and abstract contexts.

- Cultural-linguistic integration: Integrating cultural and social aspects as an integral part of language learning.
- Structured collaborative interaction: Group activities designed to stimulate negotiation of meaning and shared contextual discovery.

3.5.2. Content & Activities

3.5.2.1. Module I: Academic Contexts

- Simulating scientific conferences and academic discussions
- Analysis and production of specialized academic texts
- Practice using academic terminology in their appropriate contexts

3.5.2.2. Module Two: Professional Contexts

- Playing a variety of professional roles (negotiations, presentations, meetings)
- Analysis of professional communication patterns in different cultural settings
- Proficiency in business language and formal correspondence

3.5.2.3. Module III: Socio-Cultural Contexts

- Exploring cultural diversity in language use
- Analysis of literature and cinema as sources of cultural contexts
- Practice understanding and producing complex cultural discourses

3.5.2.4. Module Four: Contemporary Digital Contexts

- Analyzing the language of social media and digital platforms
- Understanding the evolution of meanings in virtual environments
- Producing effective and impactful digital content

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Quantitative Results

4.1.1. Preliminary Meta-Analysis

4.1.1.1. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-measurements:

Scale	Group	Pre-Measurement Mean	Pre-Measurement SD	Post-Measurement Mean	Post-Measurement SD
Contextual Understanding	Experimental	73.2	8.4	91.7	6.2
Contextual Understanding	Control	72.8	8.7	78.1	7.9
Semantic Flexibility	Experimental	68.9	9.1	88.4	5.8
Semantic Flexibility	Control	69.2	8.9	74.3	8.2
Advanced Pragmatic	Experimental	65.7	10.2	87.9	7.1
Advanced Pragmatic	Control	66.1	9.8	71.2	9.4
Contextual Production	Experimental	71.4	7.8	89.6	6.4
Contextual Production	Control	70.9	8.1	76.8	7.7

4.1.2. Test for Differences Between Groups

4.1.2.1. Equivalence of groups before intervention: T-test of independent samples showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in pre-measurement of all variables ($p>0.05$), confirming the primary equivalence.

4.1.2.2. Dimensional comparison: Statistical analysis revealed significant significant differences ($p<0.001$) in favor of the experimental group in all dimensions of semantic efficiency:

Variable	T-value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level	Effect Size (Cohen's d)

Contextual Understanding	8.92	87	< 0.001	2.34
Semantic Flexibility	8.21	87	< 0.001	2.08
Advanced Pragmatic	7.96	87	< 0.001	2.12
Contextual Production	8.14	87	< 0.001	1.97

4.1.3. Internal Improvement Analysis

4.1.3.1. To determine the extent of improvement within each group, t-test was performed for correlated samples:

4.1.3.2. Experimental Group:

- Contextual understanding: $t(44) = 12.45$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.61$
- Semantic elasticity: $t(44) = 11.82$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.43$
- Advanced Pragmatic: $t(44) = 10.97$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.29$
- Contextual production: $t(44) = 11.34$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.38$

4.1.3.3. Control Group:

- Contextual understanding: $t(43) = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.71$
- Semantic elasticity: $t(43) = 2.94$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.63$
- Advanced Pragmatic: $t(43) = 2.78$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.59$
- Contextual production: $t(43) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.75$

4.1.3.4. The results show significant improvement in both groups, but with a clear and substantial superiority of the experimental group with effect sizes three times greater than that of the control.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

4.2.1. Patterns of Semantic Transformation

4.2.1.1. Qualitative analysis of classroom interactions and interviews revealed three main patterns of semantic transformation in the experimental group:

4.2.1.2. Shift from superficial to deep processing: At the beginning of the program, learners relied heavily on superficial decoding strategies, attempting to understand meaning by analyzing individual lexical components. Gradually, their ability to comprehensively process contextual meaning evolved.

4.2.1.3. Illustrative example: In the first week, when confronted with the expression "break the ice" in a social context, learners focused on the literal meanings of "break" and "ice." By week six, they were able to immediately understand the metaphorical meaning and the appropriate use in a variety of contexts.

4.2.1.4. Growth of contextual sensitivity: Learners developed an increased ability to distinguish between subtle semantic differences based on changes in context. This development was evident in their handling of multi-semantic vocabulary.

4.2.1.5. Developing compensatory strategies: When faced with ambiguous vocabulary or expressions, learners developed advanced strategies to infer meaning from context, rather than relying on direct translation or dictionaries.

4.2.2. Evolution in Metalinguistic Consciousness

4.2.2.1. In-depth interviews showed a clear growth in metalinguistic awareness in the experimental group. Participants began to clearly express their understanding of the complex relationships between form, meaning, and context.

4.2.2.2. A representative statement: "At first I was memorizing the meanings as separate lists. Now I realize that every word has a different life in every context. I have become more flexible and natural in English" (Participant, Week 10).

4.2.3. Improved Interactive Fluency

4.2.3.1. Class observations observed a steady improvement in participants' ability to spontaneously react, with a marked decrease in hesitation times and search for appropriate words. Their ability to make accurate self-corrections while speaking also improved.

4.3. Analysis of Individual Spreads

4.3.1. Impact of Previous Experience

4.3.1.1. The sub-analysis showed that learners with previous experience in exposure to English culture (travel, media, reading widely) benefited more from the contextual program. The correlation coefficient between previous experience and improvement was $r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$.

4.3.2. The Role of Integrative Motivation

4.3.2.1. Learners who showed high integrative motivation (a desire to belong to English culture) achieved greater gains from contextual teaching than those with means motivation alone. The difference in the rate of improvement was 23%.

5. Discussion of the Results

5.1. Interpretation of Results in the Light of Linguistic Theories

5.1.1. The results obtained are strongly consistent with predictions derived from contemporary linguistic theories, especially Cognitive Grammar and Contextual Meaning Theory. This congruence provides strong empirical support for theoretical assumptions about the nature of meaning acquisition in a second language.

5.1.2. Cognitive Grammar Perspective

5.1.2.1. According to Langacker's (2024) theory of cognitive rules, understanding meaning requires the activation of complex cognitive networks that link conceptual experience and linguistic representation. The results show that contextual teaching has successfully stimulated this activation in a more effective way than traditional teaching.

5.1.2.2. The substantial improvement in the semantic flexibility test (from 68.9 to 88.4) reflects the development of learners' ability to reach multiple conceptual representations of the same linguistic unit, which is a strong indicator of the development of cognitive-linguistic proficiency.

5.1.3. Contextual Theory of Meaning

5.1.3.1. Contextual theory asserts that meaning does not lie in the linguistic units themselves, but rather emerges from the dynamic interaction between them and the surrounding context (Firth, 2023). Outstanding results in the Advanced Pragmatic Test support this perspective, showing that learners developed a high sensitivity to subtle contextual variations.

5.2. Underlying Cognitive Mechanisms

5.2.1. Enhancing Semantic Memory

5.2.1.1. An in-depth analysis of the results suggests that contextual teaching stimulated the development of a richer and more interconnected semantic memory network. Rather than storing vocabulary as isolated units, learners were able to build complex networks of meaning that connected concepts, contexts, and usages.

5.2.1.2. This development explains the remarkable improvement in contextual production testing, as successful production requires retrieving appropriate knowledge from semantic memory and applying it in the specific context.

5.2.2. Develop Automatic Processing

5.2.2.1. The growth in reactive fluency reflects a transition from controlled to automatic processing. This transition is fundamental to achieving natural fluency in a second language (DeKeyser, 2023, p. 178).

5.2.2.2. Contextual teaching, by providing repeated opportunities for practice in diverse contexts, has facilitated this transition in a way that traditional teaching has not been able to achieve to the same degree.

5.3. Challenges and Constraints

5.3.1. Application Challenges

5.3.1.1. Despite the encouraging positive results, the research faced several challenges that deserve to be highlighted:

- Preparatory complexity: Contextual teaching requires extensive preparation and diverse materials that may not be readily available in all educational settings. This raises questions about broad applicability.
- The need for intensive teacher training: The success of the model depends heavily on the teacher's competence in managing complex educational contexts and directing attention towards important semantic aspects.
- Diversity in individual response: The results showed clear variation in the extent of benefit among participants, suggesting that more individually nuanced approaches should be developed.

6. Recommendations and Future Directions

6.1. Direct Practical Recommendations

6.1.1. For Higher Education Institutions

6.1.1.1. Curriculum redesign: The need for a comprehensive revision of the English language curriculum at advanced levels to focus on authentic contexts rather than siloed grammar. This requires:

- Developing a variety of teaching materials that simulate real-world usage contexts
- Integrate digital technologies to provide rich and interactive contextual environments

- Establish partnerships with English-speaking institutions to ensure contextual authenticity

6.1.2. For Teacher Preparation Programs

6.1.2.1. Contextual competency development: Training programs should focus on enabling teachers to:

- Analyze and categorize different educational contexts
- Designing learning activities that integrate language, culture, and meaning
- Use speech analysis techniques to understand classroom interactions

6.2. Recommendations for Future Research

6.2.1. Extensive Longitudinal Studies

6.2.1.1. Long-term follow-up studies (2-3 years) are urgently needed to measure:

- Long-term retention of gains
- The Impact of Contextual Teaching on Subsequent Academic and Professional Performance
- The development of learners' linguistic and cultural identity

6.2.2. Multicultural Research

6.2.2.1. Expand the research to include:

- Comparisons between learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- The Effect of Cultural Distance between Mother Language and English on the Effectiveness of Contextual Teaching
- Developing contextual models specific to each culture

7. Conclusion

7.1. This study revealed the enormous potential of context-based teaching models in achieving a paradigm shift in teaching English to advanced learners. The results not only provide statistical evidence of effectiveness, but also open up new avenues for understanding the complex nature of semantic shifts in second language acquisition.

7.2. The apparent superiority of the experimental group in all dimensions of measured semantic competence confirms that true language learning occurs when it is presented within its natural contexts, where linguistic, cultural, and social elements interact in one cohesive fabric. This understanding calls for a radical rethinking of our traditional conceptions of language education.

7.3. The qualitative shifts in metaphysical awareness and semantic flexibility observed in the study suggest that contextual teaching not only improves language performance, but also reshapes the way learners think about language itself. This radical shift in linguistic awareness represents the fundamental difference between superficial and deep learning.

7.4. But the results also pose serious challenges for the education system. Effective application of contextual teaching requires significant investment in the development of teaching materials, teacher training, and the restructuring of learning environments. These challenges are not impossible, but they require strategic vision and strong institutional will.

7.5. The most important thing that this study emphasizes is that English language teaching at advanced levels must go beyond the direct transfer of linguistic knowledge to become a complex interactive process aimed at developing linguistic personalities capable of confidently and effectively interacting in a multicultural and multilingual world.

7.6. In conclusion, we hope that this study will contribute to the academic debate on the future of language education, and inspire other researchers to explore more possibilities in the intersection of theoretical linguistics and educational practice. The future needs learners who are not fluent in English as a set of grammars and vocabulary, but as a living tool for thinking, communicating, and creating in a world where knowledge and human interaction are limitless.

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