

Language Acquisition

Eng 329

2015

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Key Issues in Language Acquisition

Title	Code	Credits	Level
Language Acquisition	Eng 329	3	3

Course Overview:

This course is designed as a course book to familiarize university English language majors with the basic topics of language acquisition. The course involves eight lessons. Each lesson starts with a set of learning objectives and ends with some evaluation activities.

Course Description:

This course is to familiarize students with the basic concepts and technical terms of language acquisition. In addition, the course content provides students with solid background knowledge about the main theories of first language acquisition as well as the main theories of second language acquisition. The course introduces some relevant research findings related to teaching/learning of English as a second or foreign language.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Differentiate between first language and second language acquisition.
2. Differentiate between language acquisition and language learning.
3. Explain the main theories of first language acquisition.
4. Evaluate the main theories of first language acquisition.
5. Explain the main stages of first language acquisition.
6. Explain the main theories of second language acquisition.
7. Identify the main stages of second language acquisition.
8. Define Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH).
9. Explain the CPH advocates' view.
10. Explain the role of CPH in second language acquisition.
11. Identify the role of the psychological factors in second language acquisition.
12. Identify key factors influencing successful multilingualism.

Course Contents:

Week	Date	Lecture
1		Introduction
2		Lesson 1: Introducing Language Acquisition
3		Lesson 2: Theories of First Language Acquisition
4		Lesson 3: Stages of First Language Acquisition
5		Midterm 1
6		Lesson 4: Theories of Second Language Acquisition
7		Lesson 5: Stages of Second Language Acquisition
8		Lesson 6: Critical Period Hypothesis
9		Midterm 2
10		Lesson 7: Psychological Factors and language acquisition
11		Lesson 8: Key Factors Influencing Successful Multilingualism
12		Revision
13		Final Exam

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Evaluation Information

- Midterm 1 (25%)
- Midterm 2 (25%)
- Final exam (40%)
- Participation (5%)
- Attendance (5%)

Reference:

Martin Hanak-Hammerl (2003): Second Language Acquisition The Interface between Theory & Practice, Austria Graz University Press.

Badawi, Mohamed Farrag (2010): Key Issues in Language Acquisition. University of Tabuk. E-learning Gate, in press.

Lesson 1

Introducing Language Acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define first language acquisition.
2. Define second language acquisition.
3. Define foreign language learning.
4. Differentiate between first language and second language acquisition.
5. Differentiate between language acquisition and language learning.

Introduction

Linguists and applied linguists used to divide language acquisition into two categories: first language acquisition and second language acquisition. With respect to foreign language, we use foreign language learning rather than acquisition for a set of reasons will be explained in the following sections of this unit.

First Language Acquisition

First language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Babies listen to the sounds around them, begin to imitate them, and eventually start producing words. Language acquisition is the process whereby children acquire their first languages. All humans (without exceptional physical or mental disabilities) have an innate capability to acquire language. Children may acquire one or more first languages. For

example, children who grow up in an environment in which only English is spoken and heard will acquire only English as their first language. Acquisition occurs passively and unconsciously through implicit learning. In other words, children do not need explicit instruction to acquire their first language but rather seem to just "pick up" language in the same way they learn to eat, drink, and walk.

Second Language Acquisition

On the other hand, second language acquisition assumes that a second language learner has a good knowledge about his/her first language before starting the process of learning the elements of the second language including its vocabulary, phonological components, grammatical patterns, language functions, structures, and writing rules. As a matter of fact, knowing a first language affects the process of second language acquisition in two different ways. Some researchers believe that second language acquisition is often hindered by the knowledge of one's first language. Every language has its own set of rules for grammar, syntax and pronunciation. These rules hinder understanding those of any given second language. However, research also says that one's cognitive development in his/her native language helps the person transfer the already learned concepts to the second language. The basic concepts and ideas of one language can be suitably applied to any other language. Thus, knowing one language is definitely helpful in learning another.

Foreign Language Learning

More importantly, foreign language acquisition is not a common concept in the current language acquisition literature. This is not an intended

negligence. There is a consensus among linguists and applied linguists researchers on using foreign language learning (FLL) instead of foreign language acquisition. They rest this view on the assumption that a foreign language is usually to be learned in schools, while a second language is to be acquired in schools and in many other social institutions.

Language Acquisition vs. Language Learning

Language Acquisition

Language learning, in contrast to language acquisition, is the process whereby humans past the critical period learn second languages. All humans have the ability to learn additional languages although, just as with other areas of study like math or science, some people are better at learning second languages than others. Older children and adults may learn one or more second languages. For example, a woman who acquired French as a child and learned English as an adult would have one first language (French) and one second language (English). Similarly, a man who acquired Japanese as a child and learned English and Spanish as an adult would also have one first language (Japanese) but two second languages (English and Spanish). First language acquisition is genetically triggered at the most critical stage of the child's cognitive development. The 'engine' of language – its syntactic system – is 'informationally encapsulated' – which means that children are not even aware of developing a complex, rule-governed, hierarchical system. Most first language speakers do not even realize this is what they are using. First language is typically acquired at the crucial period of cognitive development; pre-puberty, when first language and other crucial life-skills are also acquired or learned. Children never resist first

language acquisition, any more than they resist learning to walk. Given even minimal 'input' during critical pre-pubescent development, all humans acquire the first language of the society or social group they are born into as a natural and essential part of their lives. Even brain-damaged and/or retarded children usually acquire the full grammatical code of the language of their society or social group. In short, first language acquisition is an essential, biologically-driven process. It is part of every individual's evolutionary history and development in the most critical stage of that individual's acquisition of essential life-skills.

Language Learning

As opposed to acquisition, learning occurs actively and consciously through explicit instruction and education. In other words, older children and adults past the critical period need explicit teaching to learn their second languages. Language learning requires explicit instruction in speaking and hearing additional languages. For example, while children who acquire English as their first language just seem unconsciously and without instruction to "know" that most adjectives precede nouns in English, those same children as adults must be taught that most adjectives follow nouns in Spanish. The brains of first language English speakers have become "hardwired" to innately accept only an adjective-noun pattern; in order to successfully learn Spanish as a second language; those English speakers must consciously learn the different pattern of noun-adjective. Or rather, second language learners must "retrain" the brain to accept language systems outside the confines of the first language. Learning is not genetically triggered in any way unless the child grows up bilingually. The syntax of the second language is not acquired unconsciously, or at least not

in the way first language syntax is acquired. Few second language learners develop the same degree of unconscious, rule governed insight into and use of the second language which they demonstrate with the first language. The second language is not learned as part of the learner's general cognitive development. It is not an essential life-skill in the same way that the first language is. There is often great conscious or unconscious resistance to second language learning. Many highly intelligent individuals with impressive learning skills often have great problems learning a second language. Many second language learners 'fossilize' at some stage, so that even if they use the second language regularly, and are constantly exposed to input in it, they fail to develop full grammatical or 'generative' competence. Second language learning is not a biologically-driven process. It is not an essential aspect of an individual's general development. Especially when the second language is simply another subject on an already overloaded school curriculum or something that has to be undertaken by people with busy lives and heavy work-loads.

Evaluation Activities

Define first language acquisition.

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Define second language acquisition.

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Define foreign language learning.

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Differentiate between first language and second language acquisition.

First language acquisition	Second language acquisition
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Differentiate between language acquisition and language learning.

Language acquisition	Language Learning
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Mark true or false:

- 1- Learning occurs consciously through explicit instruction and education.
- 2- Language learning does not require explicit instruction.
- 3- Second language learning is not a biologically-driven process.
- 4- All humans have the ability to learn additional languages.
- 5- First language acquisition is genetically triggered at the child's cognitive development.
- 6- Children never resist their first language acquisition.
- 7- People acquire their first language as a natural and essential part of their lives.
- 8- First language acquisition is an essential biological process.
- 9- Foreign language learning is common than acquisition.
- 10- First language affects negatively second language acquisition.

Lesson 2

Theories of First Language Acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Name the main theories of first language acquisition.
2. *Explain Behaviorist theory.*
3. *Explain Language Acquisition Device (LAD).*
4. *Explain cognitive theories.*
5. *Explain social interactionist theories*
6. *Explain sociolinguistic functional model*
7. Evaluate the main theories of first language acquisition.

Introduction

There are a number of theories to explain how the human infant acquires language. How the very young child becomes a language user is a focal area of research for many researchers. In this lecture, I will shed some light on some of the main theories/approaches of first language acquisition: Behaviorist theory of language acquisition; Chomsky and the Language Acquisition Device; Cognitive theories; Social interactionist theories; Halliday's sociolinguistic functionalist model.

1- Behaviorist theory

Behaviorists believe that all behaviors are learnt and they extend this notion even to sophisticated behaviors like language. In his book *Verbal Behavior* (1957) Skinner argued that language, like much early learning,

was acquired by imitation. So the child might hear the word 'milk' said as his or her parent hands them a glass of milk. The word becomes associated with the context and the parent is likely to praise or 'rein-force' the child's appropriate utterance of the word. Of course imitation does account for some kinds of learning – we have to hear our mother tongue spoken in order to acquire a vocabulary – but the behaviorist theory is less convincing when we move on from content words like 'milk', 'ball' and 'Mummy' to words like 'yesterday', 'because' and 'when'.

2- Language Acquisition Device (LAD)

One of the best known linguists contributing to our understanding of early language acquisition is Chomsky who believed with other nativists that language ability was genetically inherited. In his book *Syntactic Structures* (1957) Chomsky criticized the mechanistic approach to language acquisition of the behaviorists and pointed to the speed with which children acquire language without overt instruction. He suggested that children have an innate predisposition to make sense of the sounds they hear. This he termed a 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD) – a grammar generating 'device' which processed fragments of language into a coherent system. If you listen to the conversation of very young children you soon find that imitation is only one strategy for learning language. In fact children seem to hypothesize and build up knowledge of syntactic rules. Interestingly it is the 'errors' young children typically make that suggest they are following rules and sometimes over generalize them. For example, as the past tense of verbs are normally inflected with an 'ed', children sometimes say 'heard' for 'heard' and as nouns often add an 's' to become plural they say 'mans' instead of 'men'.

3- Cognitive theories

Chomsky's theory has had its critics; Margaret Donaldson, for instance, thinks the notion of a language acquisition device can be just as mechanical as the behaviorist stimulus response model. Where, she asks, is 'the warm blood in the veins?' (Donaldson, 1973, p. 39). She refers to the view of John Macnamara who suggests that children do not have something as specific as sensitivity to language, but rather they have a well developed capacity for making sense of situations involving direct human interaction. Macnamara, Piaget and other developmentalists leaning towards the cognitive view believe that language acquisition is part of general intellectual development. Piaget, for instance, believed that sensori-motor kinds of thinking (where the child feels his or her way round the environment and knows it through perception seeing, touching and tasting) need to be in place before verbal language can be acquired.

We have to be careful not to give the impression that all theorists under the cognitive umbrella think the same. Macnamara, for instance, gives much more emphasis than Piaget to the human element in situations in helping children make sense of them (Donaldson, 1973).

4- Social Interactionist Theories

These theories, which became influential in the late 1970s and 1980s, emphasize the social purposes of language. Although Vygotsky was no longer alive, the implications of much of his thinking was only now becoming assimilated. He believed that the impetus to learning language was essentially social. While Piaget had tended to stress the importance of learning from objects, Vygotsky saw the adult, whether parent or teacher,

and other children as very much part of the social situation in which a child takes on both a culture and a language. Vygotsky's views on early thinking and concept formation and the implications for classroom learning are discussed in his best known book *Thought and Language* (1962).

Jerome Bruner is sometimes placed with the cognitive theorists. Like Piaget he suggests a number of overlapping stages in a child's development beginning with the enactive stage when the child makes sense of the world by movement and perception, progressing to an 'iconic' stage when the child can represent the world through images and finally reaching the symbolic stage when speech makes it possible to organize the thinking of the previous stages. In Bruner's theory we continue to learn through all three ways of representing the world. However, while he seems to stand with the cognitive theorists in believing some learning uses non-verbal cognitive abilities, he also insists on the powerful role of language, from an early age, in organizing experience and thinking and communicating with others. Bruner, like Vygotsky, believes that young children's minds grow when they are stimulated and challenged by other children and adults. In this sense he leans towards a more interactionist view than, for example, Piaget.

5- Sociolinguistic Functional Model

Theories of early language acquisition have not only come to us from psycholinguistics. Sociolinguists have also taken an interest and one of the most influential is M.A.K. Halliday. Halliday asked a different question to the psycholinguists. He was interested in the functions for which children began to use language. In fact he began to study his own young child's

attempts at communication long before he had words. Halliday suggests that the first six functions of language acquired by a young child are:

Instrumental → makes needs known

Regulatory → influences and manipulates others

Interactional → keeps relationships developing

Personal → establishes a unique identity

Heuristic → sparks the will to learn

Imaginative → to do with playing games, role play and creating stories.

The seventh function – the *informational* or ‘I’ve got something to tell you’ function is evident after about twenty-two months. The notion of telling somebody something they do not know is an advanced one and is usually dependent on words.

In short, no one theorist has answered all the questions about how children achieve the amazing feat of learning their language so quickly. Each perspective offers some insight. The behaviorists remind us of the role of imitation, while the nativists show that children actively construct their language. The cognitive theorists draw our attention to ways of making sense other than by verbal language and the social interactionists indicate the social and cultural functions of language. Sociolinguists like Halliday draw attention to the importance of having purposes so that language can serve functions in our social world. All these insights – not least the picture

of the child as essentially an active meaning maker – have implications for teaching and learning in the primary school.

Limitations of Behaviorism

While there must be some truth in Skinner's explanation, there are many objections to it. Language is based on a set of structures or rules, which could not be worked out simply by imitating individual utterances. The mistakes made by children reveal that they are not simply imitating but actively working out and applying rules. For example, a child who says "drinked" instead of "drank" is not copying an adult but rather over-applying a rule. The child has discovered that past tense verbs are formed by adding a /d/ or /t/ sound to the base form. The "mistakes" occur because there are irregular verbs which do not behave in this way. Such forms are often referred to as intelligent mistakes or virtuous errors. The vast majority of children go through the same stages of language acquisition. There appears to be a definite sequence of steps. We refer to developmental milestones. Apart from certain extreme cases (see the case of Genie), the sequence seems to be largely unaffected by the treatment the child receives or the type of society in which s/he grows up. Children are often unable to repeat what an adult says, especially if the adult utterance contains a structure the child has not yet started to use. The classic demonstration comes from the American psycholinguist David McNeill. The structure in question here involves negating verbs:

Child: Nobody don't like me

Mother: No, say, "Nobody likes me."

Child: Nobody don't like me.

(Eight repetitions of this dialogue)

Mother: No, now listen carefully: say, "Nobody likes me."

Child: Oh! Nobody don't likes me.

Few children receive much explicit grammatical correction. Parents are more interested in politeness and truthfulness. It seems to be truth value rather than well-formed syntax that chiefly governs explicit verbal reinforcement by parents - which renders mildly paradoxical the fact that the usual product of such a training schedule is an adult whose speech is highly grammatical but not notably truthful. There is evidence for a critical period for language acquisition. Children who have not acquired language by the age of about seven will never entirely catch up. The most famous example is that of Genie, discovered in 1970 at the age of 13. She had been severely neglected, brought up in isolation and deprived of normal human contact. Of course, she was disturbed and underdeveloped in many ways. During subsequent attempts at rehabilitation, her caregivers tried to teach her to speak. Despite some success, mainly in learning vocabulary, she never became a fluent speaker, failing to acquire the grammatical competence of the average five-year-old.

Limitations of Chomsky's theory

Chomsky's work on language was theoretical. He was interested in grammar and much of his work consists of complex explanations of grammatical rules. He did not study real children. The theory relies on

children being exposed to language but takes no account of the interaction between children and their careers. Nor does it recognize the reasons why a child might want to speak, the functions of language. In 1977, Bard and Sachs published a study of a child known as Jim, the hearing son of deaf parents. Jim's parents wanted their son to learn speech rather than the sign language they used between themselves. He watched a lot of television and listened to the radio, therefore receiving frequent language input. However, his progress was limited until a speech therapist was enlisted to work with him. Simply being exposed to language was not enough. Without the associated interaction, it meant little to him. Subsequent theories have placed greater emphasis on the ways in which real children develop language to fulfill their needs and interact with their environment, including other people.

Limitations of the Cognitive Theory

During the first year to 18 months, connections of the type explained above are possible to trace but, as a child continues to develop, so it becomes harder to find clear links between language and intellect. Some studies have focused on children who have learned to speak fluently despite abnormal mental development. Syntax in particular does not appear to rely on general intellectual growth.

For further reading:

Chomsky, Noam (1957) *Syntactic Structures* The Hague: Mouton.
Donaldson, Margaret (1973) *Children's Minds* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Halliday, M.A.K. (1975) *Learning How to Mean* London: Edward Arnold.
Whitehead, Marian R. (2004) *Language and Literacy in the Early Years* London: Paul Chapman.

Evaluation Activities

PART ONE

Question 1:

Name the main theories of first language acquisition.

Question 2:

Explain Behaviorist theory.

Question 3:

Explain Language Acquisition Device (LAD).

Question 4:

Explain cognitive theories.

Question 5:

Explain social interactionist theories

Question 6:

Explain sociolinguistic functional model

Question 7:

Evaluate the main theories of first language acquisition.

PART TWO

Mark true or false:

- 1- Behaviorists believe that behaviors are learnt even languages.
- 2- Skinner argued that language was acquired by imitation.
- 3- According to Skinner, hearing a language is essential to learn it.
- 4- Skinner's theory depends on imitating individual utterances.
- 6- Chomsky believes that language ability was genetically inherited.
- 7- Chomsky suggests that children have an innate device to acquire their language.
- 8- According to Chomsky, we acquire the language via an LAD.
- 9- Cognitivists think that language acquisition is part of general intellectual development.
- 10- Social interactionist theories neglect the social purposes of language.
- 11- Sociolinguistic functional model links language functions to language acquisition.

Lesson 3

Stages of First Language Acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Name the main stages of first language acquisition.
2. *Explain Pre-speech Stage.*
3. *Explain Babbling Stage.*
4. *Explain One word (Holophrastic) Stage.*
5. *Explain Combining words Stage.*

Introduction

When infants acquire a first language, they learn one of the most complex skills of their lives and they attain adult levels of skill in many domains by the age of 5 or 6. How do they learn a system that requires mastery of the sound system, a huge vocabulary, grammatical rules, meanings, and rules for usage, as well as articulatory skill, auditory discrimination, memory storage, recognition, and retrieval? What may be innate and what learned in this complex task has long intrigued psychologists, linguists and philosophers (Bloom 1993). In their efforts to answer this question, researchers have kept records of how children advance from babbling, to words, to complex utterances. Since the 1960s, they have paid increased attention to the acquisition of different languages (Slobin 1985; 1991) and to the stages children go through.

Stages in child language acquisition

1- Pre-speech Stage

Much of importance goes on even before the child utters his first word: infants learn to pay attention to speech, pay attention to intonation and the rhythm of speech long before they begin to speak. Infants respond to speech more keenly than to other sounds. Speech elicits greater electrical activity in the left side of the 2 month old infant's brain than do other sounds. Experiment with microphone and nipple showed that infants suck more vigorously if the action triggers a human voice as opposed to music or other sounds. Child learn to recognize the distinctive sounds, the phonemes of the language they hear from birth long before they are able to pronounce them. Infants can distinguish between /p/ and /b/ at three or four months (in an experiment with /ba/ played vs. /pa/, a two month infant showed awareness of the change). But children do not learn how to use these sounds until much later-- around the second year or later--as shown by the experiment with /pok/ and /bok/. The same is true for rising vs. falling intonation, which only becomes systematically functional much later. Infants know the difference between one language and another by recognition of phonological patterns (Story of the Russian fairy tale book.)

2- Babbling Stage

Begins at several months of age. Characterized by indiscriminate utterance of speech sounds-- many of which may not be used in the given language but are found in other languages-- clicks. Many native speech

sounds may be absent-- some are naturally harder to pronounce-- /r/ /th/. Very few consonant clusters and repeated syllables are common.

3- One word (Holophrastic) Stage

Infants may utter their first word as early as nine months: usually mama, dada (these words resemble babbling). Deaf babies whose parents use sign language begin making their first word/gestures around eight months. This stage is characterized by the production of actual speech signs. Often the words are simplified: "du" for duck, "ba" for bottle. When the child has acquired about 50 words he develops regular pronunciation patterns. This may even distort certain words-- turtle becomes "kurka". Incorrect pronunciations are systematic at this time: all words with /r/ are pronounced as /w/. sick--thick, thick--fick. Children tend to perceive more phonemic contrasts than they are able to produce themselves. The first 50 words tend to be names of important persons, greetings, foods, highlights of the daily routine such as baths, ability to change their environment-give, take, go, up, down, open. The meaning of words may not correspond to that of adult language: **overextension**-- dog may mean any four legged creature. apple may mean any round object. bird may mean any flying object. Child can still distinguish between the differences, simply hasn't learned that they are linguistically meaningful. Dissimilarities linguistically redundant. Two patterns in child word learning-- **referential**-- names of objects. **Expressive**-- personal desires and social interactions: bye-bye, hi, good. Child's place on this continuum partly due to parent's style: naming vs. pointing. The extra-linguistic context provides much of the speech info. Rising and falling intonation may or may not be used to distinguish questions from statements at the one-word stage. Words left out if the contexts makes them obvious.

At this stage, utterances show no internal grammatical structure (much like the sentence yes in adult speech, which can't be broken down into subject, predicate, etc.)

4- Combining words Stage

By two and a half years most children speak in sentences of several words--but their grammar is far from complete. This stage rapidly progresses into what has been termed a fifth and final stage of language acquisition, the **All hell breaks loose stage**. By six the child's grammar approximates that of adults. Children learning any language seem to encode the same limited set of meanings in their first sentences: ownership-- Daddy's shoes; describing events-- Me fall; labeling-- That dog; locational relations-- toy in box. Sentences usually two words. Children can repeat more complex sentences spoken by adults but cannot create them until later (called prefabricated routines) not indicative of the child's grammar. Other patterns in early speech. The ends of words learned more quickly: -raff for giraff, -mato for tomato, -narna for banana. This is true even in lang. where the stress is always on the first syllable. Avoidance of exceptions-- overextension of a pattern: go--goed; good--gooder. The rest of the acquisition of grammar is idiosyncratic-- some children repeat more, others create more. Some children produce a great number of words before beginning to combine them into sentences. Others immediately begin to make sentences. There may be several individual routes to mastering one's native language.

Evaluation Activities

PART ONE

Question 1:

Name the main stages of first language acquisition.

Question 2:

Explain Pre-speech Stage.

Question 3:

Explain Babbling Stage.

Question 4:

Explain One word (Holophrastic) Stage.

Question 5:

Explain Combining words Stage.

PART TWO

Mark true or false:

1- Infants can distinguish between /p/ and /b/ in the pre-speech stage.

2- Infants know the difference of phonological patterns.

3- Very few consonant clusters and repeated syllables are common in the babbling stage.

4- Infants may utter their first word in the Holophrastic stage

5- In the combining words stage, most children speak in sentences of several words.

Lesson 4

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- 1. Explain Krashen's Acquisition-Learning hypothesis*
- 2. Explain Krashen's Monitor hypothesis*
- 3. Explain Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis*
- 4. Explain Krashen's Input hypothesis*
- 5. Explain Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis*
- 6. Explain the role of grammar in Krashen's View*

Introduction

According to Stephen Krashen, language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill. Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful. Krashen's theory of second

language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Natural Order hypothesis, the Input hypothesis, and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

1- The Acquisition-Learning hypothesis

The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. According to Krashen, there are two independent systems of second language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition'.

2- The Monitor hypothesis

The Monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three

specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule. It appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. According to Krashen, the role of the monitor is - or should be - minor, being used only to correct deviations from 'normal' speech and to give speech a more 'polished' appearance. Krashen also suggests that there is individual variation among language learners with regard to 'monitor' use. He distinguishes those learners that use the 'monitor' all the time (over-users); those learners who have not learned or who prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under-users); and those learners that use the 'monitor' appropriately (optimal users). An evaluation of the person's psychological profile can help to determine to what group they belong. Usually extroverts are under-users, while introverts and perfectionists are over-users. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the 'monitor'.

3- The Natural Order hypothesis

The Natural Order hypothesis is based on research findings (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Fathman, 1975; Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987) which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, conditions of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in the studies, there were statistically significant similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition. Krashen however points out that the implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a

language program syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

4- The Input hypothesis

The Input hypothesis is Krashen's attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language. In other words, this hypothesis is Krashen's explanation of how second language acquisition takes place. So, the Input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses along the 'natural order' when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to 'Comprehensible Input' that belongs to level 'i + 1'. Since not all of the learners can be at the same level of linguistic competence at the same time, Krashen suggests that natural communicative input is the key to designing a syllabus, ensuring in this way that each learner will receive some 'i + 1' input that is appropriate for his/her current stage of linguistic competence.

5- The Affective Filter hypothesis

Finally, the fifth hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis, embodies Krashen's view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise'

the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

The Role of Grammar in Krashen's View

According to Krashen, the study of the structure of the language can have general educational advantages and values that high schools and colleges may want to include in their language programs. It should be clear, however, that examining irregularity, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching, but rather is "language appreciation" or linguistics. The only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition (and proficiency) is when the students are interested in the subject and the target language is used as a medium of instruction. Very often, when this occurs, both teachers and students are convinced that the study of formal grammar is essential for second language acquisition, and the teacher is skillful enough to present explanations in the target language so that the students understand. In other words, the teacher talk meets the requirements for comprehensible input and perhaps with the students' participation the classroom becomes an environment suitable for acquisition. Also, the filter is low in regard to the language of explanation, as the students' conscious efforts are usually on the subject matter, on what is being talked about, and not the medium.

This is a subtle point. In effect, both teachers and students are deceiving themselves. They believe that it is the subject matter itself, the study of grammar, that is responsible for the students' progress, but in reality

their progress is coming from the medium and not the message. Any subject matter that held their interest would do just as well.

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Evaluation Activities

PART ONE

Question 1:

Explain Krashen's Acquisition-Learning hypothesis

Question 2:

Explain Krashen's Monitor hypothesis

Question 3:

Explain Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis

Question 4:

Explain Krashen's Input hypothesis

Question 5:

Explain Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis

Question 6:

Explain the role of grammar in Krashen's View

PART TWO

Mark true or false:

- 1- According to Krashen, acquisition is the product of a subconscious process.
- 2- According to Krashen, learning is the product of formal and conscious instruction.
- 3- According to Krashen learning is less important than acquisition.
- 4- Learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'.
- 5- The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function.
- 6- The role of the monitor is minor.
- 7- The Natural Order hypothesis suggests that acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable.
- 8- The Input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'.
- 9- Krashen claims that learners with high motivation learn better than de-motivated ones.
- 10- Low anxiety learners acquire second language easily.

Lesson 5

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Name the main stages of second language acquisition.
2. *Explain the pre-production stage*
3. *Explain the early production stage*
4. *Explain the speech emergence stage*
5. *Explain the intermediate fluency stage*
6. *Explain the advanced fluency stage*

Introduction

A large body of research has documented that most of the second language learners go through similar stages in the process of learning a second language. To learn a second language, learners have to undergo five common respective stages namely; pre-production stage, early production stage, speech emergence stage, intermediate fluency stage, and advanced fluency stage. However, the length of time each learner spends at a particular stage may vary greatly. That is to say, it is important to keep in mind that different learners may not pass through all stages at the same rate or even in the same sequence. Regardless of how second language learners progress through these stages, teachers have to support and encourage them to learn a new language easily.

1- Pre-production Stage

This stage is also called the silent period. While the second language learners take in the new language, they do not speak it. This period often lasts

six weeks or longer, depending on learners' capabilities and learning situation. The pre-production stage is a basic period in second language acquisition. During this silent or observation stage, second language learners are to listen to the target second language trying to make sense of what goes on around them. Second language learners may possess hundreds of words in their receptive vocabulary but they are unable to speak or produce the language. During this stage, second language learners can repeat the words, expressions, and patterns of the target second language. However, such learners are not really producing the target second language. They are rather parroting. That is why, this stage is named a pre-production stage.

Pedagogically, to make good use of this stage, second language learners have to listen attentively to varied authentic materials to build up a solid vocabulary repertoire. Second language learners, at this stage, need much repetition of the target second language. Moreover, they may be asked to copy words from the board or their books. They may be required to respond physically to some pictures or visuals.

2- Early Production Stage

This stage may last up to six months during which second language learners begin to speak using short words and sentences, but the emphasis is still on listening and absorbing the new second language. There will be many errors in the early production stage. In other words, second language learners develop a store of receptive and active vocabulary. During this stage, second language learners begin to use words or phrases that are important for their survival in the classroom. They can usually produce simple phrases of two-words in the target second language. They can use short language chunks that have been memorized. Yet they are subject to commit some mistakes on

producing such chunks. In other words, they begin to use the language but is still not sure of what constitutes a separate word in the target second language.

For better learning a second language, during this stage, language teachers can give the learners the opportunity to participate in some of the whole class activities, modify content information to the level of their learners, provide listening activities, build vocabulary using pictures, simplify the content materials to be used, focus on key vocabulary, use simple books with predictable text, and support learning with graphic organizers.

3- Speech Emergence Stage

During this stage, second language learners can communicate with simple phrases and sentences. Speech becomes more frequent, words and sentences are longer, but second language learners still rely heavily on context clues and familiar topics. Second language learners' vocabulary continues to increase and errors begin to decrease, especially in common or repeated interactions. They are able to ask simple questions, that may or may not be grammatically correct. Second language learners can also initiate short conversations with classmates. They will understand easy stories read in classes with the support of pictures. They can do some content work with teacher support.

Second language learners have to sound out stories phonetically, read short, modified texts in content area subjects, complete graphic organizers with word banks, understand and answer questions about charts and graphs, compose brief stories based on personal experience, write in dialogue journals. Second language learners can write about topics that interest them and proceed at their own level and pace. The learners should be given a chance to express their thoughts and ideas.

4- Intermediate Fluency Stage

Second language learners, at this stage, have a large body of active vocabulary. They are beginning to use more complex sentences when speaking and writing and are willing to express opinions and share their thoughts. Speech is fairly fluent in social situations with minimal errors. New contexts and academic language are challenging and the second language learners struggle to express themselves due to gaps in vocabulary and appropriate phrases. The individual is able to speak almost fluently in new situations or in academic areas, but there will be gaps in vocabulary knowledge and some unknown expressions. They can ask questions to clarify what they are learning in class. They can understand more complex concepts. At this stage, second language learners can use strategies from their native language to learn content in target second.

At this stage, second language learners' writing may contain many errors due to the complexity of the target second language grammar and sentence structure. Most of the second language learners may tend to translate written assignments from native language into the target second language. Pedagogically, this is the time for second language teachers to focus on learning strategies.

5- Advanced Fluency Stage

It takes second language learners from 4-10 years to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency in the target second language. Second language learners, at this stage, show a high level of language production. The second language learners communicates fluently in all contexts and can maneuver successfully in new contexts and when exposed to new academic

information. At this stage, the second language learners may still have an accent and use idiomatic expressions incorrectly at times, but the individual is essentially fluent and comfortable communicating in the second language.

Pedagogically, second language learners, at this stage, are close to native language fluency and can interact well in a variety of situations. Although the second language learners may seem completely fluent, they still benefit from visual support, building on background knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary and making connections between content areas. Offer challenge activities to expand second language learners' vocabulary knowledge such as identifying antonyms, synonyms and the use of a thesaurus and dictionary. Demonstrate effective note-taking and provide a template.

Evaluation Activities

PART ONE

Question 1: Name the main stages of second language acquisition.

Question 2: Explain the pre-production stage.

Question 3: Explain the early production stage.

Question 4: Explain the speech emergence stage.

Question 5: Explain the intermediate fluency stage.

Question 6: Explain the advanced fluency stage.

PART TWO

Mark true or false:

1- Pre-production stage lasts six weeks or longer, depending on learners' capabilities and learning situation.

2- The pre-production stage is a basic period in second language acquisition.

3- Early production stage may last up to six months.

4- in the early production stage, learners can produce simple phrases of two-words in the target second language.

5- During speech emergence stage, second language learners can communicate with simple phrases and sentences.

6- Second language learners have a large body of active vocabulary in the intermediate fluency stage.

7- Advanced fluency stage takes second language learners from 4-10 years to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency.

Lesson 6

Critical Period Hypothesis

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Define Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH).
2. Explain the CPH advocates' view.
3. Explain the CPH opponents' view.
4. Explain the role of CPH in second language acquisition.

Introduction

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is a central topic in discussing the relationship between language acquisition and age. The CPH claims that there is a critical period or biologically determined period for better language acquisition beyond this period language is increasingly difficult to acquire. Some linguists suggest that the crucial period of language acquisition ends around the age of 12 years. Simply, if language is not acquired before the end of the critical period, it can never be acquired or learned in a normal and fully functional sense. Again, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is the idea that there is a specific time period in which language learning best occurs. It is believed, by some, that it affects both first and second language learning.

The advocates of the CPH make good use of the language difficulties experienced by some wild children to validate the CPH. Wild children or feral children are children who have grown up with minimal human contact or even none at all. Some of them, especially those who were over twelve or

thirteen years old, could not learn human languages. All what they could do was repeating few words.

In other words, children's brains were able to recover from this much faster than an adult with the same injuries. Because the brain heals so quickly when young, this must be the critical period for learning language. Long term mastery of a second language decreases as age increases. Because children can pick up a second language faster, this must be because they are still in their critical period. The older a child is when he starts learning sign language, the harder of a time he has acquiring it. This must mean that he has missed his critical period for learning language. If the child was rescued before the age of 7, much greater gains were made in acquiring language. This must be because a child is still in his critical period before the age of 7.

Opponents of the CPH claim that wild children are hardly growing up in a nurturing environment. Therefore, the lack of language acquisition may be due to abusive environment rather than the lack of exposure to language. In addition, it is unclear if wild children's inability to learn is due to the fact that they missed the critical period, or to the fact that they experienced extreme trauma as children. More rapid recovery in children is due to the fact that a different side of the brain took over the function in a child; adults' brains are already fully developed so this isn't possible. Second language acquisition doesn't necessarily have anything to do with first language acquisition. Just because one can acquire a second language faster does not mean he couldn't acquire it outside of his critical period. Studies find that these children do eventually acquire sign language proficiency although it does take longer to learn. This refutes the critical period hypothesis saying that one can learn language at any age. It is not certain if children in cases of extreme deprivation have trouble learning language because they have

missed their so-called "critical period" or if it is because of the extreme trauma they have experienced.

To conclude, it is true that there is a critical period for language acquisition but this does not mean adults cannot learn a second language perfectly.

Applied to second language acquisition, this hypothesis states that second language competence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve some time around or after puberty. The research findings, however, have not yet been conclusive: Long (1990), for instance, presents a number of findings in support of this hypothesis not only in phonology but also in morphology and syntax. These findings are also supported by Skehan (1998: 222-235). However, Genesee (1988: 100-103) provides contradictory findings from studies such as in one case where older learners achieved higher levels of L2 proficiency than younger learners, at least in the initial stage of their learning. Nevertheless, it seems logical to examine age-related differences in language learning, because virtually every learner undergoes significant physical, cognitive, and emotional changes at puberty.

As you can see, the Critical Period Hypothesis is just that a hypothesis! It cannot be proven through the tests that have been run in the above discussions, or tests run on Genie. So, judge for yourself! Do YOU think there is a Critical Period for learning language?

Evaluation Activities

PART ONE

Question 1:

Define Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH).

Question 2:

Explain the CPH advocates' view.

Question 3:

Explain the CPH opponents' view.

Question 4:

Explain the role of CPH in second language acquisition.

PART TWO

Mark true or false:

- 1- According to the critical period, adults cannot learn a second language perfectly.
- 2- Second language acquisition becomes increasingly difficult around or after puberty.
- 3- The Critical Period Hypothesis is just that a hypothesis.
- 4- Feral children are children who have grown up with minimal human contact.
- 5- The crucial period of language acquisition ends around the age of 12 years.

Lesson 7

Psychological Factors and language acquisition

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the role of the psychological factors in second language acquisition.

Introduction

Language involves interaction with others. Psychological factors play an important role in a learner's success in acquiring and using a second language. A learner is simultaneously an individual and a member of a group. In this lesson, I will talk about learners as individuals. As an individual, a person carries character traits that enable him/her to function in different ways and deal with situations in a unique and personal style.

Psychological factors can be divided into two categories: affective or emotional, and cognitive, although there is not a clear cut between affective and cognitive factors. The mastery of a language creates on the students an affective or emotional response: enjoyment, pride, etc, but also the work of mastering a language (a second language) can be considered cognitive. The teachers need to be aware of all these factors and work with students in order to help them promote their learning.

Affective/Emotional Factors

The affective domain is the means through which individuals become aware of their environment , respond to it with feelings, and act according to them. Some of these feelings are:

Self-esteem

A large part of a person's feelings revolve around the way that person feels about himself/herself. According to Schumann, there are three aspects of self-esteem: Global (overall assessment of one's worth), specific (self-evaluation in various life situations, e.g., at work, and in individual characteristics, such as personality and intelligence), and task (self-evaluation in particular tasks). It is unclear that high self-esteem causes language success, but teachers should encourage students to feel proud of their successes and abilities, because they may facilitate language learning.

Motivation

It's the impulse, emotion or desire that causes one to act in a certain way. Various individual, socio-cultural and instructional factors impact motivation. There are two types of motivation according to Gardner and Lambert: Instrumental motivation (the need to acquire a language for a specific purpose, e.g., getting a job), and integrative motivation (the desire to become a member of the culture of the second language group) Although it is hard to identify and study it, motivation is key to learning.

Anxiety

Anxiety when learning a second language can be seen as similar to general feelings of tension that students experience in the classroom. Almost everyone feels some anxiety when learning, and having to perform in a new language compounds anxious feelings.

Attitudes

Attitudes play a critical role in learning a second language, for example English. Attitudes toward self, toward language, toward English-speaking people, and toward the teacher and the classroom environment affect students.

Empathy

It's the capacity to be aware of the feelings of the others and to share them. It involves the connection of oneself with others. When learning a second language, listeners must understand the intentions and emotions of a speaker and attempt to comprehend the message.

Evaluation Activities

Question 1:

Explain the role of the psychological factors in second language acquisition.

Lesson 8

Key Factors Influencing Successful Multilingualism

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the key factors influencing successful multilingualism.

Introduction

Bilingualism is usually a rewarding experience filled with social and academic gains. However, for some, the process can be a time of anxiety. Many parents often sacrifice the gift of a second or third language in order to spare their children the stress of the learning experience. It would be more advisable for families to gain a clear understanding of the factors they have an influence over and those factors which are in nature's hands. In this lesson, I define ten key factors in raising multilingual children namely; Aptitude, Timing, Motivation, Strategy, Consistency, Opportunity, the Linguistic Relationship between the Languages, Siblings, Gender and Hand-Use as it reflects cerebral dominance are all important, even in their absence. Awareness of these factors can help parents in their vital roles as guides in their children's language learning process.

1- Aptitude:

Each person is born with a certain aptitude for different life skills. People with a high aptitude for foreign languages learn languages easily; people with low aptitude do so with difficulty. You cannot influence how much aptitude a person has, but you can make the most of what exists. It is

estimated that aptitude for foreign languages is on par with other talents, with roughly 10% of the population enjoying its benefits.

2-Timing:

The windows of opportunity are times when certain skills can best be learned. There are three windows of opportunity for foreign language acquisition. The first and “easiest” is from birth to nine-months. The second is between four and eight years old due to children’s lower inhibition levels. The third is from nine-years and onwards as the brain reaches its full size (though not in terms of neuroconnections).

3- Motivation:

It includes both positive versus negative, and internal versus external factors. Falling in love is a fantastic motivating force, as is hatred. Helping a child find his own reason to learn a language is far more effective than forcing a language on him.

4- Strategy:

It means making a conscious decision to approach language development in a certain way and (5) **Consistency** is each person’s (including parents’) ability to stay true to the agreed upon strategy. There are at least seven thoroughly research strategies, including the one-person-one-language approach. No strategy is more efficient than another, though it has been shown that it is easier to be consistent with OPOL, for example, than with using “time” (dinner time, weekends, etc.) as a guiding strategy.

6- Opportunity:

It means the daily use of the language(s) in meaningful situations. The amount of time an individual can spend actually using the target language(s) is the single factor which separates adult and child bilingual success. Harley (1986) actually showed that adults are superior to children

when learning a foreign language if and when they dedicate the same amount of time to the task.

7- The Linguistic Relationship between Languages:

Does the native language share roots with the second language? If so, the second language is easier to learn due to the similarity of grammar, vocabulary and sound systems.

8- Siblings

Siblings can have a positive as well as negative effect. In the positive, siblings learn a great deal from one another as they have a greater number of verbal exchanges and conversations in a day. However, in the negative case, one child may dominate the language exchange and stunt the other's development.

9- Gender:

We now have the technology to see how boys and girls approach language from different parts of the brain and this is influential in both first, second and subsequent languages.

10- Brain:

Most people have their main language area of the brain in the left hemisphere, but a small percentage (30%) of those who write with their left hand and five percent of those who write with their right hand actually have language spread over a greater area. This group may favor different teaching methods, and thus **Hand-Use**, as it reflects cerebral dominance, makes up the last of our ten factors. Every individual will combine the Ten Factors differently. Such individuality is what gives researchers and educators awe at the human capacity for language, and what challenges parents and teachers to emphasize an individual approach to the process. It is also the

source of anxiety and stress for many families as no one can tell you the “right way” to approach the bilingual or multilingual family experience. What parents can do, however, is determine their children’s own personal recipes and make the most of each of the factors influencing their success.

Evaluation Activities

Question 1:

Explain key factors influencing successful multilingualism.