L2 and Foreign Language Acquisition: The study of Interlanguage (What)

Conceptual objective: the students will be able to identify interlanguage phenomena, stages and features
Procedural objective: the students will be able to evaluate those features on real learners' corpus
Attitudinal objective: the students will become aware of their own interlanguage

3.1. General questions to reflect again (about the second language)
3.1.1. Domain-specific or domain-general theories of language development?
3.1.2. Is the learning of a second language a continuous or discontinuous process?
3.1.3. Is the process similar to all the learners? (Universal competence or individual variation)
3.1.4. Do learners have to learn about language structures or functions?
3.1.5. Do they learn rules or associations?

3.2. A metaphor about the learner's language:
"The Ecology of Language Acquisition"

(Brown, 1994: 296)
3.3. A brief historical account about Interlanguage

First Period:

**PSYCHOLOGY:**
Conductist Approaches: Habit Formation

**LINGUISTICS:**
Hierarchy of Difficulty // Contrastive A.

**LEARNING METHOD:**
Audiolingual Method

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**Prevailing psychological orientation:**

Behaviourism:

Habits through repeated association between stimulus and response, bonded when positively reinforced.

Focus only on publicly observable responses, those that can be objectively perceived recorded and measured.

*See introduction in topic number one.

**Prevailing linguistic orientation:**

Contrastive Analysis:

1. language is a set of habits
2. old habits are hard to break, while new habits are hard to acquire
3. the native language will of necessity interfere with the learning of a second or foreign language
4. the differences between the native language and the foreign language will be the main cause of errors
5. Where two languages are similar, positive transfer will occur, where they are different, negative transfer, or interference, will result
6. a linguistic Contrastive Analysis can make these differences explicit
7. language teachers and textbook writers must take the linguist’s CA into account when preparing teaching materials
8. Hierarchy of Difficulty
Hierarchy of Difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of difficulty</th>
<th>L1: English</th>
<th>L2: Spanish</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Split</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘for’ is either por or para</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 New</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>grammatical gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Absent</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>‘do’ as a tense carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Coalesced</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘his/her’ is realized as a single form su</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Correspondence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-ing, -ndo as complement with verbs of perception, e.g. ‘i saw the men running’; ‘vi a los hombres corriendo’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prevailing teaching method:
Audiolinguual Method (…)

Strong versus Weak version of C.A. (Some criticisms: on psychology and Linguistic Theory):

- CA did not predict all errors. It underpredicted and overpredicted some errors.
- One cannot depend on a purely linguistic analysis to describe a psycholinguistic process
- CA is pedagogically relevant only when all learners speak same language
- Results not very reliable on the syntactic or lexical level (they are on the phonetic one)
- Some other factors such as age or level of proficiency should be taken into account

(Weak version of CA: Error analysis)
(does not predict but explains)
Second Period:

**PSYCHOLOGY:**
Mentalist Approaches: LAD

**LINGUISTICS:**
Generative-Transformational Grammars/U.G

**TEACHING/LEARNING METHOD:**
Error Analysis ???

Prevailing psychological orientation: Mentalist/Nativist approaches + LAD
- Language learning is a product of rule formation or hypothesis testing.
- Human beings endowed with language Acquisition Device: INNATE predisposition to induce the rules of target language from the input they are exposed to. (See typical errors such as ‘eated’)
- Learners make similar developmental errors

Prevailing Linguistic orientation:
- Language is creative, not ‘imitation’ or ‘habit formation’
- LAD: four innate linguistic properties:
  1. ability to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds in the environment
  2. ability to organize linguistic events into various classes which can later be refined
  3. knowledge that only a certain kind of linguistic system is possible and that other kinds are not
  4. ability to engage in constant evaluation of the developing linguistic system so as to construct the simplest possible system out of the linguistic data that are encountered.
- Universal Grammar: attempt to discover what it is that all children, regardless of their environmental stimuli (the language) they hear around them bring to the language acquisition process. Studies have looked at question formation, negation, word order, discontinuity of embedded clauses, and several other grammatical phenomena.
- Remember ‘pivot grammar’
- Remember ‘full access’, ‘partial access’ and ‘no access’ hypotheses.
Prevailing teaching method:
(Not exactly a method, only opposition to audiolingual one.

In the classroom: *Error Analysis*

The strong version of CA predicted errors a priori.
The weak version starts with learner errors and explain a posteriori (Corder, 1967):
- Not all errors are due to L1 interference.
- Some errors show the learner engaged in creative process.

1. Error taxonomies
   A. Types of errors:
   - See Table (Corder, 1967)
   - Difference: Error // Mistake

2. Procedure for identifying errors in second language learner production data (Corder, 1971)
   - Distinction:
     - Overt/covert errors
     - Sentence/discourse level
   - Categories
3. Criticisms to Error Analysis

- Danger of too much attention to learners’ errors. If teachers are preoccupied with noticing errors many correct utterances may go unnoticed.
- They study what learners are doing wrong, but not what makes them successful. It is often impossible to identify the unitary source of an error.
- Overstressing of production data.
- Errors fail to account for avoidance phenomena
- Production errors are only a subset of the overall performance of the learner.
- These criticisms have not led to the demise of EA, but to the incorporation of these studies into Performance analysis (third period).
Third Period

‘Creative construction theories’// Morpheme studies:

Dulay and Burt (1974) following Identity Hypothesis

Morpheme order: same for learners from different L1. (See Figure 3.2. Sharwood Smith)

Arguments: many errors that were assumed to be produced due to L1 interference might be overgeneralization errors:

‘he no wanna go’

Result:

Thus they began to study when and in what order the native forms came to appear regularly in learners’ utterances (Developmental Processes).

According to creative construction theorists…

- Second language acquisition is driven by essentially the same set of processes that are active in first language acquisition
- L2 structures are developed in a particular ‘pre-programmed sequence irrespective of the L1 background of the acquirer. The sequence is similar (not identical) to that of an equivalent L1 acquirer.
- Within the sequence in which target forms are acquired, there may be a mini-sequence of intermediate forms leading up to that particular target
- Acquisition takes place via exposure to the language not by means of any conscious analysis of the linguistic but by analysis at a subconscious level. It is thus not directly amenable to deliberate control by either learner or teacher.
- For development to take place, language input must be comprehensible to the learner and must contain samples of the next construction on the list in the developmental sequence: the next target form or the next non-native form with characteristically leads to the next target form.
3.4. The learners’ active role in language acquisition: the notion of interlanguage. Evolving definitions

3.4.1. Corder (1967): transitional system
   3.4.1.1. Role of LAD and input for rule formation and reformulation
   3.4.1.2. Role of errors
   3.4.1.3. Role of mother tongue
   3.4.1.4. Status of learner hypotheses
   3.4.1.5. Unique character of learner system

Transitional system: Learning a L2 is seen as an operation whereby the LAD builds a system using the language to which the learner is exposed (input) and creating out of that input a particular transitional system. This transitional system is modified when new input encountered by the learner is seen to conflict with the rules of that system: the learning device’s hypotheses are disconfirmed. Using this transitional system the learner produces systematic utterances (conforming to the target language rules) and other non-conforming features which are what the teacher would call systematic ‘errors’.

Three more important aspects of this transitional competence:
   a. role of mother tongue (hypotheses are formed on the basis of the L1 and also with reference to the input, so the basis is not the L1)
   b. status of ‘learner hypothesis’ (largely unconscious)

   unique character of learner systems versus normal languages.

3.4.2. Nemser (1971): approximative systems
   3.4.2.1. Directional and discrete stages
   3.4.2.2. Deviant system

Succession of evolving systems that take learner nearer and nearer to the target system and further and further from the source system: Approximative systems.

3.4.3. Selinker (1972): Interlanguage
   3.4.3.1. Role of L1 acquisition
   3.4.3.2. Role of LAD: fossilization
   3.4.3.3. Processes of Interlanguage
      3.4.3.3.1. L1 transfer
      3.4.3.3.2. Overgeneralization
      3.4.3.3.3. Transfer of training
      3.4.3.3.4. Strategies of second language learning
      3.4.3.3.5. Communication strategies
      3.4.3.3.6. Use of target language rules
      3.4.3.3.7. Backsliding
Interlanguage (Selinker, 1972): separateness of a second language learner’s system, structurally intermediate between native and target languages. The differences with Corder: Role of L1 and Type of Learning.

For Selinker acquiring a second language is different from acquiring a first language, so there is no child language (but interlanguage) as the original mechanism for learning (lateralization) are atrophied. (Fossilization).

3.4.4. Common things between the three notions

- Existence of a complex, creative learning device
- Internal coherence in the learner’s language system
- Independent character of learner’s system

3.4.5. Interlanguage analysis: fossilization

3.4.5.1. Two alternative explanations of this phenomenon
3.4.5.2. Stages: How does fossilization take place?
   - 3.4.5.2.1. Random errors
   - 3.4.5.2.2. Emergence
   - 3.4.5.2.3. Systematic stage
   - 3.4.5.2.4. Stabilization: resulting in fossilization
3.4.5.3. Factors affecting fossilization

Fossilization Phenomena (Selinker)

Why??

May be first and second language acquisition are driven by different mechanisms (that’s why it takes place only in L2 acquisition)
May be first and second language acquisition are driven by the same learning mechanisms but the L2 process is disturbed by some external factor or cluster of factors such as inadequate input, lack of motivation or interference from the L1

How??

1st stage: Random errors: Learners do not know systematic aspects of L2 (‘lexical stage’)
2nd stage: Emergence: There exist some rules, different from L2 rules. Overgeneralizations occur.
3rd stage: Systematic: rules are similar to L2 rules. Learner is able to self-correct
4th stage: Stabilization: the learner has no communication problem. He commits few errors

Result
Fossilization: In the process of rule formation and hypothesis testing, the learner does not ‘see’ any errors, so he does not correct himself, even if errors are still present. If the learner receives positive feedback—he is understood, even with mistakes—he will not correct himself. This is typical of advanced learners, who have errors for a long time.

Factors affecting fossilization: sex, listening capacity, hemisphere specialization, age, motivation, personality, absence of learning opportunities...

3.4.6. Interlanguage features: the product and the process
3.4.6.1. Simplified, systematic and dynamic continuum
3.4.6.2. Common production errors: overgeneralization phenomena
3.4.6.3. Developmental patterns
   3.4.6.3.1. Early pattern of development
      3.4.6.3.1.1. Silent period
      3.4.6.3.1.2. Routines and formulas
      3.4.6.3.1.3. Structural and semantic simplification
   3.4.6.3.2. General route of some morphosyntactic developmental patterns
      3.4.6.3.2.1. Morpheme studies
         1. First set of target patterns
         2. Second set of target patterns
         3. Third set of target patterns
         4. Fourth set of target patterns
      3.4.6.3.2.2. Interrogatives
         1. Rising intonation
         2. Uninverted wh-word
         3. “Overinversion”
         4. Differentiation
      3.4.6.3.2.3. Negatives
         1. External
         2. Internal, pre-verbal
         3. Auxiliar + negative
         4. Analysed
   3.4.6.3.3. Problems with/in developmental patterns
      1. MLU for L2
      2. Variability
      3. Replication of results
      4. Lack of studies for other developmental patterns
3.4.6.4. L1 influence and rate of development

![Diagram of L1 influence on L2](image)

Figure 3.3: The role of the L1 in L2 communication and learning (Ellis, 1994: 339)

3.4.6.4.1. Transfer versus interference
3.4.6.4.2. Types of cross-linguistic influence
  3.4.6.4.2.1. Grammatical transfer
    1. Delay sequences
    2. Speed up passage through sequences
    3. Add sub-stages to sequences
    4. No change in order or omission of sequences
  3.4.6.4.2.2. Communication transfer
  3.4.6.4.2.3. Pragmatic transfer
3.4.6.4.3. Factors affecting transfer
  1. Linguistic complexity
  2. Permanence in L2 country
  3. Level of competence
  4. Markedness
  5. Perceived transferability

3.4.6.5. (Linguistic) variability within the route
  3.4.6.5.1. Horizontal variation
    3.4.6.5.1.1. Individual variation: personality and contextual factors
  3.4.6.5.1.2. Group variation
    1. Free variation or context-dependent variation
    2. Sources: linguistic, situational and psycholinguistic contexts
  3.4.6.5.1.3. Types: form-function variation and task induced variation
  3.4.6.5.2. Vertical variation

3.4.6.6. Use of communication strategies
  3.4.6.6.1. Definition
  3.4.6.6.2. Types: several classifications
    3.4.6.6.2.1. Tarone (1981)
      1. Paraphrase
      2. Transfer/borrowing
      3. Avoidance
      4. Mime
      5. Appeal for assistance
Learner Strategies (go over Selinker Interlanguage processes):

1. Examples of learner strategies identified in ‘early’ development (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: Table 3.4.)
2. Two types:
   
   A. **Learning strategies**: a series of skills used with a particular learning purpose in mind. Ability to monitor the learning situation and respond accordingly. They deal with the receptive domain of intake, memory, storage and recall.

   B. **Communication strategies**: employment of verbal or nonverbal mechanisms for the productive communication of information.

Role: some prefer to see strategies as having a special status in interlanguage theory while others see them more simply as a reflection of general human problem-solving behaviour and nothing specific to L2 behaviour.

B. Communication strategies

1. (See general classifications: Tarone, 1981; Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985)
2. In the Classroom: Analysis of Learners’ productions.

3.2.5.5.3. Performance and interaction as a learning and/or communication strategy

Performance as a communication strategy.
Also a learning strategy? (Swain and Lapkin, 1982)

Roles for output:
- To generate better input (through the negotiation of meaning)
- To force syntactic processing
- To test hypotheses
- To develop automaticity
- To develop discourse skills
- To develop a personal voice

Learning strategy? Probably not (Skehan, 1998), as communic. St. Help us rely on time-creating devices, context, prediction skills, elliptical language, and a range of similar performance factors to reduce processing load that we have to deal with during conversation. The older we become, the more adept at exploiting these resources, but LANGUAGE USE, in itself, does not lead to the development of an analytic knowledge system since meaning distracts attention from form.
3.3. Summary: about adult second language acquisition

3.3.1. Can adults and adolescents “acquire” a language?

3.3.2. Errors
   3.3.2.1. L1 transfer errors
   3.3.2.2. Systematic developmental errors
   3.3.2.3. Role of error correction

3.3.3. Role of practice

3.3.4. Predictable order of some sequences in acquisition

3.3.5. Language rule knowledge and language rule use

3.3.6. Fossilization

3.3.7. The role of context

3.3.8. The learner task

3.4. Conclusions. What is the learner’s language?

3.4.1. The creative learner’s role in hypothesis testing: a recreating continuum (LAD) or restructuring continuum (L1)?
   3.4.1.1. Role of creativity
   3.4.1.2. Role of linguistic rules
   3.4.1.3. Role of analysis

3.4.2. The other side of the coin: the learner’s use of memorized chunks of language
   3.4.2.1. Role of memory
   3.4.2.2. Role of lexical knowledge
   3.4.2.3. Role of automatic processes

3.4.3. The language learning process: What comes before, rules or conversation?
   3.4.3.1. Role of grammar, lexis, text and discourse

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**The learner’s language I:**

Item vs system learning (Ellis, 1999b) / Rule-based vs exemplar-based language (Skehan, 1998b)

What is formulaic language?
- routines
- formulas

What are its features?
Why does it exist?
How can we combine the notion of rule-based language, hypothesis testing and formulaic or memorized language?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Creativity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chunks of language</td>
<td>Units of lgg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-analytic</td>
<td>Analytic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>Rule-based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To study learners’ language: Discourse Analysis

“Communicative competence is the ability to manipulate the system, selecting forms that not only make for coherent text but also meet goals and fit the ritual constraints of communication. That is, communicative competence is the ability to create coherent text that is appropriate for a given situation within a social setting. Discourse analysis is a description of the many subsystems that promote coherence and the social constraints that operate on those subsystems”.

“It is not enough to look at input and to look at frequency; the important thing is to look at the corpus as a whole and examine the interactions that take place within conversations to see how that interaction, itself, determines frequency of forms and how it shows language functions evolving.
Our basic premise has long been that the child learns some basic set of syntactic structures, moving from a one-word phase to a two-word phase, to more complex structures, and that eventually the child is able to put these structures together in order to carry on conversations with others. In second language learning the basic assumption has been, if anything, stronger than it is in first language acquisition literature. We would like to consider the possibility that just the reverse happens. One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed”.

(Hatch, 1978: 403-4)

“In addition to the structure and meaning of the individual sentences, we need to know how the sentences relate to each other”.

(Nunan, 1993: 2)

“An analytic system that looks only at syntactic and/or lexical variables will not be adequate or sufficient to an understanding of text, which is taken to be “the proper domain of linguistic theory and description”. Discourse analysis may be the foundation for a new linguistics”.

(Kaplan, 1990: 203-4)
3.5. Questions to reflect

- What is what the learner actually learns? UG and cognitive accounts of interlanguage theories
- What is what the learner should learn?
- What are the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition?

**Basic Bibliography**


**Complementary Bibliography**


