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Abstract. *The article discusses several theories that have been proposed to explain the aspects of the language acquisition such as behaviorism and Universal Grammar. All theories of language acquisition are intended to account for is the ability of human learners to acquire language within a variety of social and instructional environments.*

Key words: *language acquisition, behaviorism, influence, target language, concept, to propose, knowledge, Universal Grammar, explicit, to expose, hypothesis.*

There are several theories that have been proposed to explain the aspects of the language acquisition that are common to all second common language learners and context. The cognitivist theories emphasize the way the mind perceives, retains, organizes and retrieves information. Finally, we will look at sociocultural theory, a perspective that places second language acquisition in a larger social context.

One of the wide-spread theories is behaviorist theory which explained: “learning in terms of imitation, practice, reinforcement, and habit formation. Much of the early research within **behaviorist** theory was done with laboratory animals, but the learning process was hypothesized to be the same for humans” [2]

Behaviorism had a powerful influence on second and foreign language teaching, especially in North America, between the 1940s and 1970s. Nelson Brooks and Robert Lado were two proponents of this perspective whose influence was felt directly in the development of audio-lingual teaching materials and teacher training. Classroom activities emphasized mimicry and memorization and students learned dialogues and sentence patterns by heart. Because language development was viewed as the formation of habits formed in the first language and these habits would interfere with the new ones needed for the second language. Thus behaviorism was often linked to the contrastive analysis hypothesis, which was developed by structural linguists in Europe and North America. According to this theory, where the first language and the target language are similar, learners should acquire target language structures with ease; where there are differences, learners should have difficulty. However, researchers have found that learners do not make all the errors predicted by the Contrastive analysis hypothesis. Instead, many of their actual errors are not predictable on the basis of their first language. Adult second language learners produce sentences that sound more like child’s. By the 1970s, many researchers were convinced that behaviorism and the contrastive analysis hypothesis were inadequate explanations for second language acquisition. Some of these criticisms arose as a result of growing influence of innatist views of language acquisition.

The rejection of behaviorism as an explanation for first language acquisition was partly triggered by Chomsky’s critique of it. Chomsky argued that, “innate knowledge of the principles of **Universal Grammar** permits all children to acquire the language of their environment during a critical period of their development”. [3]

While Chomsky did not make specific Claims about the implications of his theory for second language learning Lydia White and other linguists have argued that Universal Grammar offers the best perspective from which to understand second language acquisition. Others, for example Robert Bley-Vroman and Jacquelyn Schachter argue that: “although universal grammar is a good framework for understanding first language acquisition it is not a good explanation for the acquisition of a second language, especially by learners who have passed the critical period”. [1]

Researchers working within the Universal Grammar framework also differ in their hypothesis about how formal instruction or the availability of feedback on their learning will affect learner’s knowledge of the second language. Bonnie Schwartz for example, concludes that, “much instruction and feedback change only the superficial appearance of language performance and do not really affect the underlying systematic knowledge of the new language. Rather, language acquisition is based on the availability of natural language in the learner’s environment”. [6].

Lydia White and other scientists who think that “The nature of universal grammar is altered by the acquisition of the first language learners may sometimes need explicit information about what is not grammatical in the second language. Otherwise, they may assume structures of the language have equivalents in the second language when, in fact, they do not”. [7] .

Researchers who study second language acquisition from a universal grammar perspective are usually interested in the language competence of advanced learners-their complex knowledge of grammar-rather than in the simple language of beginning learners. They are interested in whether the competence that underlies the performance or use of the second languages resembles the competence underlying the language performance of native speakers.

Thus, their investigations often involve grammaticality judgments or other methods to probe what learners know about the language rather than observation of speaking. By using such methods, they hope to gain insight into what learners actually know about the language rather than how they happen to use it in a given situation. One model of second language acquisition that was influenced by Chomsky’s theory of first language acquisition was Stephen Krashen’s Monitor Model. He first described this model in the early 1970s, at a time there was growing dissatisfaction with language teaching methods based on behaviorism. Krashen described his model in terms of five hypothesis.

First in the **acquisition-learning hypothesis**, Krashen contrasts these two terms: “We acquire as we are exposed to samples of the second language we understand in much the same way that children pick up their first language-with no conscious attention to language form. We “learn” on the other hand through conscious attention to form and rule learning”. [4]

Next according to the **monitor hypothesis**, the acquired system initiates a speaker’s utterance and is responsible for spontaneous language use. The learned acts as an editor or “monitor”, making minor changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced. Such monitoring takes place only when the speaker or writer has plenty of time, is concerned about producing correct language, and has learned the relevant rules.

The natural order hypothesis was based on the finding that, as in first language acquisition, second language acquisition unfolds in predictable sequences. The language features that are the easiest the state and thus to learn are not necessarily the first to be acquired. For example, the rule for adding I to third person singular verbs in the present tense is easy to state, but even some advanced second language speakers fail to apply it in a spontaneous conversation.

The input hypothesis is that acquisition occur when one is exposed to one language that is comprehensible and that contains $i+1$. The “i” represents the level of language already acquired, and the “+1” is a metaphor for language (words, grammatical forms, aspects of pronunciation) that is just a step beyond that level.

The fact that some people who are exposed to large quantities of comprehensible input do not necessarily acquire a language successfully is accounted for by Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. The "affective filter" is a metaphorical barrier that prevents learners from acquiring language even when appropriate input is available. "Affect" refers to feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. A learner who is tense, anxious, or bored may "filter out" input, making it unavailable for acquisition.

In spite of lively criticism and debate, Krashen's ideas were very influential during a period when second language teaching was in transition from approaches that emphasized learning rules or memorizing dialogues to approaches that emphasized using language with a focus on meaning, since then, **communicative language teaching**, including **immersion** and **content based instruction** has been widely implemented, and Krashen's ideas have been source of ideas for research in second language acquisition. Classroom research has confirmed that students can make great deal of progress through exposure to comprehensible input without direct instruction. Studies have also shown, however, that students may reach a pant from which they fail to make further progress on some features of the second language. Unless they also have access to guided instruction. Some insight from learning theories developed in psychology help to explain why this maybe so.

A number of hypotheses, theories, and models for explaining second language acquisition have been inspired by the cognitivist, developmental perspective.

Richard Schmidt proposed the "noticing hypothesis", suggesting that, "...nothing is learned unless it has been noticed. Noticing does not itself result in acquisition, but it is the essential starting point".[5]

Schmidt's original proposal of noticing hypothesis came from his own experience as a learner of Portuguese. After months of taking classes, living in Brazil, and keeping a diary, he began to realize that certain features of language that had been present in the environment for the whole time began to enter his own second language system only when he had noticed them, either because they were brought to his attention in class or because some other experience made them salient. Drawing is on psychological learning theories. Schmidt hypothesized that second language learners could not begin to acquire language feature until they had become aware of it in the input.

In the end, what all theories of language acquisition are intended to account for is the ability of human learners to acquire language within a variety of social and instructional environments. At present, most of the research on specific brain activity during language processing must be based on indirect evidence. Advances in technology are rapidly increasing opportunities to observe brain activity more directly. Such research will eventually contribute to reinterpretations of research that, until now, can examine only observable behavior.

Many claims from behaviorist theory were based on experiments with animals learning a variety of responses to laboratory stimuli. Their applicability to the natural learning of languages by humans was strongly challenged by psychologists and linguists alike, primarily because of the inadequacy of behaviorist models to account for the complexity involved in language learning.

Linguists working from an innatist perspective draw much of their evidence from studies of the complexities of proficient speakers' language knowledge and performance and from analysis of their own intuitions about language. Critics of this view argue that it is not enough to know what the final state of knowledge is and that more attention should be paid the developmental steps leading up to this level of mastery. Researchers and educators who are hoping for language acquisition theories that give them insight into language teaching practice are often frustrated by lack of agreement among the 'experts'. The complexities of second language acquisition, like those of first language acquisition, represent puzzles that scientists will continue to work on for a long time. Research that has theory development as its goal has important long-term significance for language teaching and

learning, but agreement on a ‘complete’ theory of language acquisition is probably, at best, a long way off. Even if such agreement were reached, there would still be questions about how the theory should be interpreted for language teaching practice. Many teachers watch theory development with interest, but must continue to teach and plan lessons and assess students’ performance in the absence of a comprehensive theory of second language learning. Language acquisition is now perceived as a process more complex than binary choices that requires more cognition, or thinking.

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