

Література

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GRYNYUK S.

(National Aviation University)

SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING

This article highlights the general updated overview of second language acquisition policy. It outlines its major notions and concepts without laying the claim to exhaustiveness of the discussed issue. Thus, it considers the basic theories of learning, factors that affect second language acquisition and learning, basic principles and procedures of the most recognized and commonly used approaches and methods for teaching a second language.

Keywords: second language acquisition, conception of learning, basic theories of learning, internal and external factors; theoretical approaches and methods for teaching a second or foreign language.

Гринюк С.П. Деякі теоретичні аспекти викладання та вивчення мови як другої іноземної. У статті висвітлено стан розвитку іншомовної політики з урахуванням сучасних тенденцій та підходів, які сьогодні мають місце у суспільстві. Подається аналіз основних теорій навчання, принципів, методів навчання другої іноземної мови та факторів, які складають стрижень процесів навчання і вивчення мови як другої іноземної.

Ключові слова: друга іноземна мова, концепція навчання, теорії навчання, теоретичні підходи та методи викладання другої іноземної мови.

Гринюк С.П. Некоторые теоретические аспекты преподавания и изучения языка как второго иностранного.

Статья рассматривает процесс развития статуса иностранного языка, принимая во внимание текущие тенденции и подходы, которые имеют место в обществе и вызваны глобальными трансформациями в мире. Анализируются основные теории обучения, принципы, методы и факторы, которые составляют основу процессов преподавания и обучения языка как второго иностранного.

Ключевые слова: второй иностранный язык, концепция обучения, теории исследования, теоретические подходы и методы преподавания второго иностранного языка.

Stating a problem. Second language acquisition research (SLA) is an extremely investigated field of study which has attracted much research work in the last decades. Much progress has been made in gaining a better understanding of the processes involved in learning second languages, as well as the crucial factors which affect this process, but much more work still remains to be done in these areas.

Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It 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. Error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition but caretakers and native speakers can modify their utterances addressed to acquirers to help them understand, and these modifications are thought to help the acquisition process. Also, the researches in this area put emphasis on unconscious and conscious language learning. The former argues that the acquirers need not have a conscious awareness of the “rules” they possess, and may selfcorrect only on the basis of a “feel” for grammaticality. On the other hand, the latter is thought to be helped a great deal by error correction and the presentation of explicit rules that, in its turn, helps the learner come to the correct mental representation of the linguistic generalization. Whether such feedback has this effect to a significant degree remains an open question.

The rationale of the article. In order to better understand second language acquisition, and this is, in fact, the rationale of this article; we need to know not only what the system constructed by learners looks like, but also the procedures which enable efficient use of this system, and how the “key integrals” interact in real time, as well as develop over time. Thus, to achieve the goal to the extent we can state that we have approached the “heart” of the problem we will try to highlight the basic concepts of this system: factors that affect the acquisition of foreign language; theories that shape the core of the discussed issue; modern approaches and methods for teaching a second or foreign language.

Overviewing the material. The starting point for all language teaching should be an understanding of how people learn. The basic theories of learning are the following [Harjanne 2007; Kurtz 2003; Second and Foreign...].

Behaviorism: This simple but powerful theory said that learning is a mechanical, process of habit formation which is influenced by means of the frequent reinforcement of a stimulus-response sequence. This theory gave rise to the principles like: 1) never translate; 2) new language should always be dealt with in the sequence: hear, speak, read, and write; 3) frequent repetition is essential to effective learning; 4) all errors must be immediately corrected.

Mentalism: It was found out that the Audio-lingual method and its behaviorist principles did not deliver the results promised. This theory insisted on translating things; asked for rules of grammar; found repeating things to a tape recorder boring; noted that people somehow failed to learn something no matter how often they repeated it.

Cognitive code: Whereas the behaviorist theory of learning assumed the learner as a passive receiver of information, the cognitive view takes the learner to be an active processor of information. This theory pointed out that: 1) learning and using a rule require learners to think; 2) learning is a process in which the learner actively tries to make sense of information; 3) learning can be said to have taken place when the learner has managed to carry out meaningful interpretation or pattern on the information; 4) we learn by thinking about and trying, to make sense of what we see, feel and hear.

The affective factor theory: This theory evolved around the cognitive theory. People think, but they also have feelings. It is one of human nature that, although we are all aware of our feelings and their effects on our actions, we invariably seek answers to our problems in rational terms. This theory is based on: 1) human beings always act in a logical and sensible manner; 2) learners are people with likes and dislikes, fears, weaknesses and prejudices; 3) learning of a language is an emotional experience, and the feelings that the learning process evokes have a crucial bearing on the success or failure of the learning; 4) the emotional reaction to the learning experience is the essential foundation for the initiation of the cognitive process.

It is not also a secret that some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. This simple fact is known by all who have themselves learned a second language or taught those who are using their second language in school. Undoubtedly, some language learners are successful by virtue of their sheer determination, hard work and persistence. However we can't simply ignore other crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of any learner, they are categorized in many documented reviews as internal and external.

Internal factors are those that the individual language learner brings with him or her to the particular learning situation. They are as follows [Kurtz 2003; Young 2007; The factors ...]:

- ***Age:*** Second language acquisition is influenced by the age of the learner. Children, who already have solid literacy skills in their own language, seem to be in the best position to acquire a new language efficiently. Motivated, older learners can be very successful too, but usually struggle to achieve native-speaker-equivalent pronunciation and intonation.

- ***Personality:*** Introverted or anxious learners usually make slower progress, particularly in the development of oral skills. They are less likely to take advantage of opportunities to speak, or to seek out such opportunities. More outgoing students will not worry about the inevitability of making mistakes. They will take risks, and thus will give themselves much more practice.

- *Motivation:* Intrinsic motivation has been found to correlate strongly with educational achievement. Clearly, students who enjoy language learning and take pride in their progress will do better than those who don't.

- *Experiences:* Learners who have acquired general knowledge and experience are in a stronger position to develop a new language than those who haven't.

- *Cognition:* In general, it seems that students with greater cognitive abilities will make the faster progress. Some linguists believe that there is a specific, innate language learning ability that is stronger in some students than in others.

- *Native language:* Students who are learning a second language which is from the same language family as their first language have, in general, a much easier task than those who aren't.

The factors that characterize the particular language learning situation are called external. They encompass the following integrals:

- *Instruction:* Clearly, some language teachers are better than others at providing appropriate and effective learning experiences for the students in their classrooms; these students will make faster progress. The same applies to mainstream teachers in second language situations.

- *Culture and status:* There is some evidence that students in situations where their own culture has a lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning the language make slower progress.

- *Motivation:* Students who are given continuing, appropriate encouragement to learn by their teachers and parents will generally fare better than those who aren't.

- *Access to native speakers:* The opportunity to interact with native speakers both within and outside of the classroom is a significant advantage. Native speakers are linguistic models and can provide appropriate feedback. Clearly, second-language learners who have no extensive access to native speakers are likely to make slower progress, particularly in the oral aspects of language acquisition.

- *Curriculum:* For ESL students in particular it is important that the totality of their educational experience is appropriate for their needs. Language learning is less likely to place if students are fully submersed into the mainstream program without any extra assistance or, conversely, not allowed to be part of the mainstream until they have reached a certain level of language proficiency.

On a scientific level second language acquisition is a field of inquiry that has increased in importance since the 1960s. The two main perspectives in the analysis of learner language of SLA research of the past few decades are as follows: 1) second language acquisition is highly systematic; 2) second language acquisition is highly variable [Myles 2013].

Although these two statements might appear contradictory at first sight, they are not, in fact. The first one primarily refers to what has been called the route of development – the nature of the stages all learners go through when acquiring the second language. This route remains largely independent of both the learner's mother tongue and the context of learning. The second statement usually refers to either the rate of the learning process – the speed at which learners are learning the second language, or the outcome of the learning process, or both. We all know and recognize that both speed of learning and range of outcomes are highly variable from learner to learner.

The theoretical approaches which have been used in order to investigate second language development fall into three broad categories i.e. learning development models: 1) Universal Grammar model (UG); 2) Cognitive model; 3) Interactionist/sociocultural model.

The Universal Grammar approach claims that humans inherit a mental language faculty which highly constrains the shape that human languages can take and therefore severely limits the kind of hypotheses that children can entertain regarding the structure of the language they are exposed to. This is why children acquire their first language easily and speedily, in spite of its complexity and abstractness, at an age when they are not cognitively equipped to deal with abstract concepts generally. In this view, the core of language is separate from other aspects of cognition, although it operates in close interaction with them. If the second language developmental route is similar in

many respects to the mother tongue route, then it must also be because the innate UG constrains second language development.

The cognitive and information processing models generally claim that language learning is no different from other types of learning, and is the result of the human brain building up networks of associations on the basis of input. Information processing models see learning as the shift from controlled processes – dealt with in the short term or working memory and under attentional control – to automatized processes stored in the long term memory – retrieved quickly and effortlessly. Recently, connectionist models have further assumed that all learning takes place through the building of patterns which become strengthened through practice.

In both the UG and cognitive models, the focus is on explaining learner-internal mechanisms, and how they interact with the input in order to give rise to learning. The emphasis on the role played by the input however, varies, with the UG approach assuming that as long as input is present learning will take place, and the other models placing a larger burden on how the input is decoded by learners, paying particular attention to concepts such as noticing or attention [Myles 2013; Young 2007].

In contrast to these models, the interactionist model has paid particular attention to the nature of the interactions second language learners typically engage in.

Researchers adopting a socio-cultural model have explored the way in which second languages are learned through a process of co-construction between “experts” and “novices”. Language learning is seen as the appropriation of a tool through the shift from inter-mental to intra-mental processes. Learners first need the help of experts in order to “scaffold” them into the next developmental stages before they can appropriate the newly acquired knowledge. This is seen as a quintessentially social process, in which interaction plays a central role, not as a source of input, but as a shaper of development.

The implications of these models of learning for teaching methodologies are essentially as follows. If the development of the second language linguistic system is primarily driven by learner-internal mechanisms, requiring the learner to map the second language input onto an innate highly constrained linguistic blueprint, then the entire classroom needs to provide is linguistic input, and learning will take care of itself. In this view, the second language acquisition process is seen as very similar to mother tongue acquisition, and children do not need to be taught grammar in order to become fluent native speakers. The UG view of language learning is consistent with the communicative language teaching approach, in the sense that both believe that learning will take place if rich natural input is present. It is important to stress though, that the two approaches developed independently of one another, with UG evolving out of the need to understand how children acquire their mother tongue, and then being applied to second language acquisition, and communicative language teaching being the result of the perceived failure of grammar-translation or audio-lingual methodologies by teachers, who felt that they did not prepare learners for real life communication needs.

The information processing or connectionist model sees learning as the strengthening of associations and the automatization of routines, leads to much more behaviorist views of learning. Thus, learners are seen as central to the acquisition process, in the sense that they have to practice until patterns are well established, and external variables take on a much greater role [Myles 2013].

These two apparently conflicting approaches are not the only ones that have been applied to the study of second language learning and teaching, but they have received most interest and generated most empirical work. These models might appear contradictory at first sight, but in fact they can be reconciled in so far as they are concerned with different aspects of SLA, which is a highly complex process. We also need to understand many aspects of the SLA process other than the acquisition of syntax and morphology, such as lexical acquisition or the development of pragmatic and sociolinguistic repertoires. In other words, if we believe UG constrains the mental grammars constructed by L2 learners, we still need to understand how learners become more fluent [Second and Foreign...].

Summary. To sum up, it is perfectly clear that fundamental theoretical and methodological problems need to be overcome in order to develop a unified theory of second language acquisition and/or learning. In terms of research methodology, we need a more multi-perspective research that is theory-, as well as data, -driven. At any rate, in order to get to the core of things, we need to lay bare the central theoretical premises and priorities that guide our inquiries. Though, the question is strongly and powerfully discussed by linguistic publicity, many of its aspects need extra investigation and still remain open to research.

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