Second Language Acquisition

Chapter 17

1st language acquisition

- Children acquire their 1st language really fast and without any effort.
- All children develop language at roughly the same age.
- The question is: if 1st language acquisition is so straightforward, why is learning a 2nd language so difficult?
Second Language Acquisition

- To Think About:
  - Think about a baby acquiring his first language.
  - Think about a person acquiring a second language.
  - What similarities and differences are there in the two processes?

Questions Mastering the L2

- *Is there a critical period for L2?*
  - For authentic accent perhaps
- *Cognitive considerations?*
  - Conscious vs. automatic learning
- *Affective considerations?*
  - Self-esteem, risk-taking, anxiety, empathy, extroversion
- *Interference between L1 and L2?*
  - Adult may be more vulnerable to interference from L1, but L1 can also be useful to adults
Second language learning

- The distinction between
  - ‘Foreign Language Learning’: “language is not generally spoken in the surrounding community.”
    - E.g. a Japanese student learning English in Japan.
  - ‘Second Language Learning’: “learning a language that is spoken in the outside community.”
    - E.g. a Japanese student leaning English in USA

Acquisition & Learning

- **Acquisition**: gradual development of a language + occurs in a naturally communicative situations with others.
  - *Results in better fluency in social interaction*
- **Learning**: conscious process of accumulating knowledge of vocabulary and grammar + in institutional setting.
  - *Results in more knowledge about the language than fluency.*
Acquisition barriers

- Why learning L2 is fundamentally different than L1?
  - Interaction not constant
  - Already have a language for communication

- Many adult learners manage to learn L2 effectively- they do not sound like native speakers
  - Joseph Conrad
  - This provides evidence for Critical Period Hypothesis

The Critical Period Hypothesis

- This hypothesis states that there is only a small window of time for a first language to be natively acquired.

- If a child is denied language input, he/she will not acquire language

- So an adult learning a second language is almost never as competent as native speakers.
Affective factors

- There are other types of acquisition barriers- negative experience that might affect language learning
  - Embarrassment- e.g. being ashamed of his/her accent
  - Lack of empathy with the other culture.
  - Dull textbooks, classrooms, schedule, etc.
- Children may overcome such factors quickly.

Focus on method

- Educational approaches to L2 learning- how L2 might best be learned
  - The grammar-translation method
  - The audio-lingual method
  - Communicative approaches
- Today’s approaches?
  - Multiple approaches, customized, interactive
The grammar-translation method

- Treating L2 as an academic subject.
- = Mother tongue, vocabulary lists, grammar, classical texts, reading
- Written rather than spoken language.

*Criticism*: does not focus on how the language is used in everyday conversations.

---

The audio-lingual method

- Emphasizes spoken language
- The use of language is a ‘habit’ that needs a lot of practice.
- Dialogue form, mimicry, set phrases, drills, memorization, tapes, language labs, pronunciation important, little use of mother tongue.
- Criticism: boring + not a natural setting, short-term effectiveness
Communicative approaches

- More concerned with the learner and nature of the acquisition process.
- Shifted to how L2 learning takes place—examining the learners errors
  - E.g. a Spanish person might say *in the room there are three womens*
    - Indicates active learning progress in coping with the new language

Transfer

- Using L1 sounds, expressions, or structure when speaking L2.
  - E.g. an Arab may say *open* the lights?
- 2 types:
  - Positive: L1 & L2 have similar features (marking of plural)
  - Negative: transferring different features
Interlanguage

- Errors that do not relate to L1 or L2
  - Interlanguage = an in-between system of L2 learners, which has some features of the L1 and L2 plus some independent of the L1 and L2.
    - E.g. Spanish learner = *She name is Maria*
  - Fixed expressions of L2 = when interlanguage stops developing to a more accurate L2 features, it is said ‘fossilized’.
  - ‘fossilization’ = foreign accent.

Motivation

- Very important in language learning.
- Instrumental motivation = to achieve some goal
  - Join a graduate school
  - Find a better job
- Integrative motivation = social purposes
  - Become an accepted member in a community
**Input & output**

- **Input** = the language the learner is exposed to
- **Input** must be simpler in vocabulary & structure = foreign talk
  - E.g. *English class, you like it?* Instead of *How are getting on in your studies?*
- **Negotiated input** = L2 materials that the learner can acquire in interaction while attention is given to what is said
- **Output** = the language the learner produces
- **interaction** = comprehensive output

---

**Competence**

- **Competence** = underlying knowledge of a language
- **What does it mean to be fluent?**
- **Communicative competence** = the general ability to use language accurately, flexibly, and appropriately
  - Grammatical competence
  - Sociolinguistic competence
  - Strategic competence
Communicative competence

Grammaratical competence
- how to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language.
- What words do I use?
- How do I put them into phrases and sentences?

Sociolinguistic competence
- how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating.
- Which words and phrases fit this setting and this topic?
- How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when I need to?
- How do I know what attitude another person is expressing?
Communicative competence

- **Strategic competence**
  - how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns
  - how to work around gaps in one’s knowledge of the language
  - how to learn more about the language and in the context.
  - How do I know when I’ve misunderstood or when someone has misunderstood me?
  - What do I say then? How can I express my ideas if I don’t know the name of something or the right verb form to use?

Applied Linguistics

- Investigating L2 learning- other fields communication studies, psychology, education and sociology.
- Deals with all other practical issues (e.g. teaching methods, designing lesson plan etc) and not just the acquisitional process.
Hope you enjoyed the course 😊