

How Languages are Learned

This workshop is part of the inlingua Special Topics Series in **Second Language Acquisition**. The workshop will address the process of first language acquisition and focus on second language acquisition, theories of second language learning, factors affecting second language learning, learner language, and myths and facts about language learning. As we analyze views about how languages are learned, we will reflect upon the implications for teaching and gain better insight into how languages should be taught.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

During this five-hour workshop, instructors will ...

1. Build common knowledge of widely used terms and concepts in the field of SLA
2. Analyze facts and myths in second language learning
3. Acquire new or enrich current knowledge of theories pertaining to first and second language acquisition
4. Identify factors affecting second language learning

Building Common Language: Some Useful Terms

ESL TESL TEFL CELTA DELTA
SLA ELL LAD UG L1 L2 CPH
CLT EFL ELT NS NNS TESOL
TPR

ESL: English as a Second Language (The teaching of English to speakers of other languages in contexts where English is the (or a) major medium of communication within the community)

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

CELTA: Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults, [CELTA](#) (Cambridge University)

DELTA: Cambridge Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults [DELTA](#)

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

ELL: English Language Learner

LAD: Language Acquisition Device

UG: Universal Grammar

L1: First Language (mother tongue, native language)

L2: Second Language/ Target language

CPH: Critical Period Hypothesis

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language **Training** (includes ESL and EFL)

NES: Native Speaker

NNES: Non Native Speaker

TESOL: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

How Languages are Learned: Myths & Facts

1. Languages are learned primarily by imitation.
2. What is the most important factor for SLA success in adults?
3. Children learn faster than adults.
4. Most of the mistakes which second language learners make are due to interference from their L1.
5. Learners' errors should be corrected right away in order to prevent the formation bad habits.
6. Students learn what they are taught.

Research & Rationale

1. **FALSE:** Language learners create their own system of rules through the development of hypotheses about how language works. There are countless examples of novel utterances that language learners produce. This is particularly evident with children who say things like: "I'm hiccing up" or "It was upside down but I turned it upside right." Children do not imitate everything they hear, but often selectively imitate certain words or structures which they are in the process of learning. This is also true of older learners learning their second language in natural settings.
2. Research findings suggest a circular cause and effect relationship between motivation and success in second language learning. Motivation can be intrinsic (internal desire to learn) or extrinsic (driven by external rewards). Motivation in second language learning is a complex phenomenon which can be defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs, and their attitudes towards the second language community.

3. FALSE: Most studies which have investigated the relationship between age of acquisition and second language development have focused on learners' phonological achievement. However, adults and adolescents learn at a faster rate, while children surpass adults and adolescents in eventual attainment. Adults and adolescents can make considerable and rapid progress towards mastery of a second language in contexts where they make use of the language on a daily basis in social, personal, professional, or academic interaction. When the objective of second language learning is native-like mastery of the target language, it is usually desirable for the learner to be completely surrounded by the language as early as possible.
4. FALSE: There are many causes for error in learner language. The transfer of patterns from the native language is one cause, but more significant is overgeneralization of the target language rules. Learners from different language backgrounds make the same errors when learning a particular second language. Errors that are the result of transfer from L1 to L2 are **interlanguage** errors. Developmental errors that occur within L2 due to overgeneralization or simplification of the rules of that language fall in the realm of **intralanguage**.

The tendency of the learner's brain to compare aspects of L2 to what it has already learned about L1 represents the cognitive operation known as **transfer**.

Positive transfer: When past learning helps the learner deal with and acquire new learning

Negative transfer: Sometimes past learning interferes with the learner's understanding of new learning, resulting in confusion or errors.

5. FALSE: Errors are a natural part of language learning. This is true of the development of a child's first language as well as of second language learning by children and adults. The errors reveal the patterns of learners' developing interlanguage systems -showing where they have generalized a second language rule or where they have inappropriately transferred a first language rule to the second language.
6. Research has shown that learners learn a great deal that no one ever teaches them. They are able to use their own internal learning mechanisms to discover many of the complex structures, rules and relationships which underlie the language they wish to learn.

Learning a First Language

Learning a language is an amazing feat, one which has attracted the attention of linguists and psychologists for generations. There are different theories that have been offered as explanations of how language is learned.

1. The **Behaviorist** position (Skinner, 1957)

Traditional behaviorists believed that language learning is simply a matter of **imitation** and habit formation. Children imitate the sounds and patterns around them and receive **positive reinforcement** for doing so. Thus, encouraged by their environment, they continue to imitate and practice these sounds and patterns until they form “**habits**” of correct language use. According to this view, the quality and quantity of the language which the child hears, as well as the consistency of the reinforcement offered by others in the environment, should have an effect on the child’s success in language learning. However, examining actual language data, we can notice that imitations are not random but selective: unlike a parrot that imitates the familiar and continues to repeat the same things again and again, children’s imitation is selective and based on what they are currently learning. Children appear to pick up patterns and then generalize them to new contexts. The behaviorist explanations for language acquisition offer a reasonable way of understanding how children learn some of the regular and routine aspect of language. However, this view can offer a partial explanation of children’s early language learning. Children’s acquisition of the more complex grammatical structures of the language requires a different sort of explanation.

2. The **Innatist** View

The linguist Noam **Chomsky** claims that children are biologically programmed for language and that language develops in the child in just the same way that other biological functions develop. For example, most children learn to walk at around the same time (they don’t have to be taught). For Chomsky, language acquisition is very similar to the development of walking. The environment (the availability of people who speak to the child) makes a basic contribution. The child’s **biological endowment** will do the rest. (1965)

Who is Chomsky?



- Avram Noam Chomsky
- Born on December 7, 1928 in Philadelphia
- Studied at University of Pennsylvania – BA, MA and PhD
- American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, logician, political commentator and activist
- Sometimes described as the “father of modern linguistics”
- Professor Emeritus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
- Wrote over 100 books
- Creator or co-creator of Chomsky hierarchy, the universal grammar theory and the Chomsky-Schutzenberger theorem
- Especially critical of the work of B. F. Skinner
- www.chomsky.info

Chomsky argues that the behaviorist theory fails to recognize what has come to be called “the logical problem of language acquisition”, the fact that children come to know more about the *structure* of their language than they could reasonably be expected to learn on the basis of the samples of language which they hear. Children do not simply learn by trial and error (example: reflexive pronouns). According to Chomsky, the language the child is exposed to in the environment is full of confusing information (false starts, incomplete sentences, or slips of the tongue). Parents correct with a focus on meaning, not on language. Children’s minds are not blank slates to be filled merely by imitating language they hear in the environment. Instead, he claims that children are born with a special ability to discover for themselves the underlying rules of a language system.

LAD: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DEVICE (or BLACK BOX)

- It contains **all and only** the principles which are universal to all human languages
(i.e.. Universal Grammar – UG).



He originally referred to this ability as the **LAD**. It was often described as an imaginary “black box” which exists somewhere in the brain. This box is supposed to contain all and only the principles that are universal to all human languages, preventing the child from going off on lots of wrong trails in trying to discover the rules of the language.

Language samples serve as a trigger to activate the device. Once it is activated the child is able to discover the structure of the language to be learned by matching the innate knowledge of basic grammatical relationships to the structures of the particular language in the environment. Later, Chomsky and his followers referred to this innate capacity as **UG** (universal grammar): a set of principles common to all languages. If children are pre-equipped with UG, then what they have to learn is the ways in which their own language makes use of these principles and the variations on those **principles** which may exist in the particular language they are learning (adjusting the **parameters**). Children seem to develop language in similar ways and on a similar schedule, in a way not very different from the way all children learn to walk. Environmental differences may be associated with some variation in the rate of acquisition (how quickly children learn), but adult linguistic competence (the knowledge of how their language works) is very similar for all speakers of one language.

Evidence used to support Chomsky's innatist position

- Virtually all children successfully learn their native language at a time in life when they would not be expected to learn anything else so complicated.
- Children achieve different levels of vocabulary, creativity, social grace, but virtually all achieve mastery of the *structure* of the language spoken around them.
- The language children are exposed to does not contain examples of all the information which they eventually know
- Children seem to accomplish the complex task of language acquisition without having someone consistently point out to them which of the sentences they hear and produce are correct and which are ungrammatical.

Biological basis for the innatist position

Chomsky's ideas are compatible with those of biologist **Eric Lenneberg** who also compared learning to talk with learning to walk. He argued that the LAD, like other biological functions, works successfully only when it is stimulated at the right time - a time which is referred to as the "critical period"; for first language acquisition, this is called the **CPH** (critical period hypothesis) (1967)

3. The **Interactionist** Position

A third theoretical view focuses on the role of the linguistic environment in interaction with the child's innate capacities in determining language development: language develops as a result of the complex interplay between the unique characteristics of the child and the environment in which the child develops. Unlike the innatists, the interactionists claim that language which is **modified** to suit the capability of the learner is a crucial element in the language acquisition process. Exposure **to one-to-one interaction** fosters language development (caretaker talk/"motherese"/modified interaction)

Summary

- The **behaviorist** view can explain how through imitation and practice some aspects of the language (word meanings and routines) are learned.
- The **innatist** view explains what goes beyond the imitation and practice and requires processing, for example in the acquisition of complex grammar, such as reflexive pronouns.
- The **interactionists** explain what is necessary for pragmatic aspects of language: communication and interaction patterns, linguistic appropriateness.

Theories of Second Language Learning

Learner characteristics & learning conditions: All second language learners, regardless of age, have by definition already acquired at least one language. This prior knowledge may be an advantage in the sense that the learner has an idea of how languages work. On the other hand, knowledge of other languages can lead learners to make incorrect guesses about how the second language works and this may cause errors which a learner of the first language would not make. How are the conditions for language learning different among ELL's?

1. Does the learner already know more than one language?
2. Is the learner cognitively mature, that is, is the learner able to engage in problem solving, deduction, and complex memory tasks?
3. How well developed is the learner's metalinguistic awareness? That is, can the learner treat language as an object (define a word, state a rule, etc.)?
4. How extensive is the learner's general knowledge of the world? This kind of knowledge makes it easier to understand language because one can sometimes make good guesses about what the interlocutor is probably saying even when the language carrying the message is very difficult.

5. Is the learner nervous about making mistakes when speaking the language?
6. Does the learning environment allow the learner to be silent in the early stages of learning? (Adults are usually expected to speak from the beginning: to meet the requirements of a classroom, to perform a task, or for job interviews)
7. Is there plenty of time available for language learning to take place, plenty of contact with proficient speakers of the language?
8. Does the learner receive **corrective feedback** when he or she makes errors in pronunciation or grammar, or does the listener overlook these errors and pay attention to the message? Errors are overlooked if meaning is comprehensible
9. Does the learner receive **corrective feedback** when he or she uses the wrong word, or does the listener usually try to guess the intended meaning? Yes, corrective feedback is provided for clarification and modeling of the right lexical item.
10. Is the learner exposed to language which is at an appropriate level of difficulty in terms of speed of delivery, complexity of grammatical structure and vocabulary?

As in first language acquisition, some theories give primary importance to the learners' innate characteristics, some emphasize the essential role of the environment in shaping language learning, and others seek to integrate learner characteristics and environmental factors in their explanation for how second language acquisition takes place.

Behaviorism: According to behaviorists, all learning, verbal or nonverbal, takes place through the same underlying process, habit formation. Learners receive linguistic input from speakers in their environment, and positive reinforcement for their correct repetitions and imitations. As a result, habits are formed. Because language development is described as the acquisition of a set of habits, it is assumed that a person learning a second language starts off with the habits associated with the first language. These habits interfere with those needed for second language speech, and new habits must be formed. For behaviorists, errors are seen as first language habits interfering with the acquisition of second language habits. This psychological learning theory has been linked to the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH). The CAH predicts that where there are similarities between the two languages, the learner will acquire target language structures with ease; whereas, where there are differences the learner will have difficulty. It is not the case that the influence is simply a matter of "habits", but rather a systematic attempt by the learner to use knowledge already acquired in learning a new language. Researchers have found that learners make many errors

which are not predictable on the basis of the CAH. For example, adult beginners use simple structures in the target language just as children do: "Yesterday I meet my teacher." The features of these simple structures are very similar across learners from a variety of backgrounds, even if the structures of their respective first languages are different from each other and from English. All this suggests that the influence of the learner's first language is not simply a matter of habits, but a much more subtle and complex process of identifying points of similarity, weighing the evidence in support of some particular feature, and even reflecting (although not necessarily consciously) about whether a certain feature seems to belong in the structure of the target language. This happens intuitively with idiomatic and metaphorical expressions.

Cognitive Theory: cognitive psychologists tend to see second language acquisition as the building up of knowledge systems. They have also investigated a phenomenon they called **restructuring**. This refers to the observation that sometimes things which we know and use automatically may not be explainable in terms of a gradual build-up of automaticity through practice. They seem rather to be based on the interaction of knowledge we already have, or on the acquisition of new knowledge which -without extensive practice- somehow fits into an existing system and may restructure this system. This is a conscious and reasoned process. This theory lacks a linguistic framework.

Creative Construction Theory: Although Chomsky does not discuss the implications of his innatist theory for SLA, others have proposed a position which is, in some respects, similar to his ideas on first language acquisition. Learners are thought to construct internal representations of the language being learned. These internal representations are thought to develop in predictable stages, in the direction of the full second language system. Production is an outcome, not the cause or need for acquisition. Acquisition takes place internally. Learners' oral or written production is useful only in so far as it allows the learners to participate in communicative situations.

The most influential of these theories has been the one proposed by **Stephen Krashen** (1982). Five central hypotheses constitute his "**Monitor Model**"

Who is Stephen Krashen?



Stephen Krashen
Professor Emeritus
School of Education
University of Southern California

- linguist and educational researcher.
- Well known US campaigner for a better understanding of second language acquisition and the education of bilingual/ethnic minority pupils.

Stephen Krash (born in 1941 in Chicago, Illinois)

1. **The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis:** According to Krashen, there are two ways for adult second language learners to approach learning a second language: they may “acquire” a language or they may “learn” it. We **acquire** as we engage in meaningful interaction in the second language in much the same way as children pick up their first language; we **learn** via a conscious process of study and attention to form and error correction (typically the classroom setting). For Krashen, acquisition is the most important process: it is only acquired language which is readily available for natural, fluent communication. (It is difficult to test this hypothesis and determine which of the **two abstract systems** is at work at any given time)
2. **The Monitor Hypothesis:** Krashen argues that the acquired system acts to initiate the speaker’s utterances and is responsible for fluency and intuitive judgements about correctness. The learned system acts as an editor or “monitor”. He concludes that the focus of teaching should be communication and not rule-learning. The weakness of this hypothesis is that it is very difficult to show evidence of monitor use: in any given utterance, it is impossible to determine what has been produced by the acquired system and what is the result of monitor use. His claim that learning cannot turn into acquisition means that anything which is produced quickly and apparently spontaneously must have been acquired rather than learned.
3. **The Natural Order Hypothesis:** we acquire the rules of a language in a predictable sequence. This order is independent of the order in which rules have been taught. Contrary to intuition, the rules that are easiest to state (for example

adding an -s to third person singular verbs in the present tense) are not necessarily the first to be acquired. Most of the evidence for this hypothesis comes from the morpheme studies, in which children's speech has been examined for accuracy of certain grammatical morphemes (mostly noun and verb ending such as plural -s and past tense -ed in English)

4. **The Input Hypothesis:** Krashen asserts that we acquire language in only one way: by receiving **comprehensible input** that is, by understanding messages. If the input contains forms and structures just beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language (i+1), then both comprehension and acquisition will occur. This hypothesis is not based on empirical grounds, but rather on intuition. Later, Krashen admitted that comprehensible input is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for acquisition.
5. **The Affective Filter Hypothesis:** It is an imaginary barrier which prevents the learner from using input which is available in the environment. Affect refers to such things as motives, needs, attitudes and emotional states. A learner who is tense, anxious, angry or bored will screen out input, making it unavailable for acquisition. Thus, depending on the learner's state of mind or disposition, the filter limits what is attended to and what is acquired. The filter will be up or operating when the learner is stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated. It will be down when the learner is relaxed and motivated.

Krashen has been criticized for lack of empirical seriousness in his hypotheses.

The Second Language Interactionist View

Proponents of this view, such as **Michael Long**, agree with Krashen that *modified input* is necessary for language acquisition. However, they are more concerned with *how* input is made comprehensible. They see interactional modifications between native speakers and non-native speakers as the necessary mechanism for this to take place.

Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

For first language acquisition it has been proved that all normal children eventually master their first language even though the rate of development may vary. To what extent can we predict differences in the success of SLA in two individuals if we have

information about their personalities, their general and specific intellectual abilities, their motivation, or their age? Studies have been conducted to correlate aptitude, motivation, and intelligence to test scores in the L2. There are some difficulties: these traits are not directly observable and measurable, how is language proficiency defined and measured? Motivation may be tied to conversational English but not to grammar, hence proficiency will vary depending on the aspect of the language being measured. Another problem is the causal element: how do we know the learner is successful due to being motivated and not the other way about? It is difficult to show with certainty that the correlations that are found between learner characteristics and success in second language acquisition are indicative of a one-way causal relationship

Intelligence: studies have shown that intelligence was related to the development of certain kinds of second language abilities, such as grammar, reading and vocabulary, but unrelated to listening comprehension or oral productive skills. Intelligence seems to be a strong factor when it comes to learning second languages in classrooms, in formal instruction. When classroom instruction is less formal (more communicative), intelligence as measured by IQ tests may play a less important role.

Aptitude: This factor has been investigated most intensively by researchers who are interested in developing tests which can predict how successful a language learner will be. According to John Carroll and **Stanley Sapon**, the authors of the **MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test)**, language learning aptitude refers to the “prediction of how well, relative to other individuals, an individual can learn a foreign language in a given amount of time and under given conditions.” This type of test measures characteristics such as the ability to

- identify and memorize new sounds
- Understand how words function grammatically in sentences
- Figure out grammatical rules from language samples
- Memorize new words

The abilities associated with success in an academic course may not be as closely linked to the success some people have in “picking up” a language.

Personality: Aspects of personality that have been studied are extroversion and inhibition. Characteristics often associated with extroversion such as assertiveness and adventurousness have been found to correlate with success in language learning. On the other hand, it has been suggested that inhibition discourages risk-taking which is necessary in progress in language learning. Other personality traits such as self-esteem, empathy, talkativeness, and responsiveness have also been studied. However, in general, the available research does not show a clearly defined relationship between

personality and SLA. Personality variables seem to be consistently related to the measurement of communicative ability, not to the measurement of grammatical accuracy or knowledge of linguistic rules. The results in this field are inconclusive.

Motivation and attitudes: Overall findings show that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second language learning. Unfortunately, the research cannot indicate precisely whether it is motivation that produces successful learning or successful learning that enhances motivation. Motivation in second language learning can be defined in terms of two factors:

- Learners' communicative needs
- Learners' attitudes towards the second language community

Motivation may be intrinsic or extrinsic. If learners need to speak the L2 in a wide range of social situations or to fulfil professional ambitions, they will perceive the communicative value of the L2 and will therefore be motivated to acquire proficiency in it. Likewise, if learners have favorable attitudes toward the speakers of the language, they will desire more contact with them. On the other hand, when speaking a new language, one is adopting some of the identity markers of another cultural group. Depending on the learner's attitudes learning a second language can be a source of enrichment or a source of resentment. One factor which often affects motivation is the social dynamic or power relationship between the languages. Members of a minority group may have different attitudes and motivation when learning the language of a majority group than those of majority group members learning a minority language.

Learning Styles: Different learners approach a task with a different set of skills and preferred strategies. One size does not fit all.

- Visual
- Auditory
- Verbal
- Kinesthetic
- Tactile
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal

Age of acquisition: Adult second language learners may become highly capable of communicating successfully in the language, but there will always be differences of accent, word choice, or grammatical features which set them apart from native speakers or from speakers who began learning the language while they were very young. As in

first language acquisition, the CPH suggests that there's a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning. Language learning which occurs after the end of the critical period may not be based on the innate structures believed to contribute to first language acquisition or second language acquisition in early childhood. Rather, older learners depend on more general learning abilities, the same ones they might use to learn other kinds of skills or information. It is claimed that this critical period ends sometime around puberty, and that adolescents and adults are no longer able to call upon the innate language acquisition capacities which work so well for young children and thus do not achieve native-like mastery of the target language. Some studies of older and younger learners who are learning in similar circumstances have shown that, at least in the early stages of second language development, older learners are more efficient than younger learners. In educational research it has been reported that learners that began learning a second language at primary school level did not fare better in the long run than those who began in early adolescence. CPH: Most studies which have investigated the relationship between age of acquisition and second language development have focused on learners' phonological achievement. But what about other linguistic features, syntax and morphology? It is important to bear in mind the goal of a second language learning program for adults: high level of proficiency for career advancement as opposed to native-like fluency in the target language, for instance. Adults and adolescents learn at a faster rate, while children surpass adults and adolescents in eventual attainment.

Learner Language

We will now shift our attention away from the learner to focus on the learner's language. Knowing more about the development of learner language helps teachers to access teaching procedures in the light of what to expect in the classroom.

Children do not learn language simply through imitation. Some of their linguistic production seems to be based on some internal processes and knowledge which permit them to discover the complexities of the adult language gradually.

The Concept of Learner Language in First Language Acquisition

Children's early speech seems best explained in terms of a developing system with its own interim rules. Children's earliest language is often called telegraphic. Research has

also shown that a child's knowledge of the grammatical system is built up in predictable sequences. Child language is not viewed as an incorrect version of the adult system, but as a system in its own right. As children continue to be exposed to opportunities to hear and use their language, they are able to revise these systems in ways which gradually develop towards the system of an adult.

What about second language learning?

Does it evolve in similar ways? Until the 1960's most people regarded second language learners' speech as an incorrect version of the target language. This incorrect speech was considered to be largely a result of transfer from the learner's first language.

Contrastive analysis was the basis for identifying differences between the first and second language and for predicting areas of potential error. So, for example one might predict that a speaker of Spanish would be likely to express the idea of being cold as "I *have* cold" in English (same thing in French). However, not all errors made by second language learners could be explained in terms of first language transfer alone. A number of studies showed that many second language learners' errors could be explained better in terms of learners' attempts to discover the structure of their first language. Some of the errors are similar to the kinds of errors made by young first language learners. Ex: regular '-ed' past tense ending on an irregular verb ('goed'). As a result, a number of researchers began to take a different approach to analyzing learners' errors. This approach, which developed during the 1970's, became known as '**error analysis**'. The goal of this research was to discover what learners really know about the language.

Larry Selinker is professor emeritus of linguistics at the University of Michigan. He introduced the concept of **interlanguage**: learners' developing second language knowledge (1972). Interlanguage exhibits:

- Some characteristics of the learner's native language
- Some characteristics of the second language
- General characteristics common to most interlanguage systems

Interlanguages are systematic, but they are also dynamic, continually evolving as learners receive more input and revise their hypotheses about the second language.

Activity: The Great Toy Robbery

The learners saw a cartoon film entitled The Great Toy Robbery (National Film Board of

Canada). After viewing the film, students were asked to retell the story in writing.

Learner 1: French first language, secondary school student

During a sunny day, a cowboy go in the desert with his horse. He has a big hat. His horse eat a flour. In the same time Santa Clause go in a city to give some surprises. He has a red costume and a red packet of surprises. You have three robbers in the mountain who sees Santa Clause with a king of glaces that it permitted us to see at a long distance. Every robbers have a horse. They go in the way of Santa Clause, not Santa Clause but pocket of surprises. After teye will go in a city and they go in a saloon [...]

(Unpublished data from P. M. Lightbown and B. Barkman)

Learner 2: Chinese first language, adult

This year christmas comes soon! Santa Claus ride a one horse open sleigh to sent present for children. on the back of his body has big packet. it have a lot of toys. in the way he meet three robbers. They want to take his big packet. Santa Claus no way and no body help, so only a way give them, then three robbers ride their horse dashing through the town. There have saloon, they go to drink some beer and open the big packent. They plays toys in the Bar. They meet a cow boy in the saloon.

(Unpublished data from M. J. Martens)

Analyze the mistakes: In what ways do the two interlanguages differ?

Many error types are common to both learners. Both make errors of subject-verb agreement. Such errors are not due to first language interference but rather are developmental in nature: they reflect learner's understanding of the second language system itself rather than an attempt to transfer characteristics of their first language. These are referred to as **developmental errors** (they might very well be made by young English native speakers learning their L1). Sometimes these errors are the result of overgeneralization (applying rule -ed) or simplification, where all verbs have the same form regardless of person, number, or tense. In the case of learner 2 we see the influence of classroom experience and formulaic expressions, such as 'one horse open sleigh' from a Christmas song. In both cases we see some interference: the use of patterns of their L1 in English.

Developmental Sequences

Research on language acquisition has revealed that there are important similarities between first language learners and second language learners. In both there are sequences or stages in the development of particular structures: certain features of the language seem to appear relatively early in a learner's language, while others are acquired much later. A surprising finding is that these developmental sequences are similar across learners from different backgrounds, even when their experiences with languages may vary and their cognitive development is stable.

The interaction between developmental sequences which are common to learners from many language backgrounds, and language features which are transferred from the learner's first language, illustrates how the learners use a variety of sources of knowledge in the effort to learn the second language. The developmental stages and the order of acquisition seem to be similar among most second language learners regardless of their native language.

Grammatical Morphemes (pp.57...)

Much research has focused on how children develop inflections, like the third person singular -s or the past tense -ed, and function words such as the articles 'a' and 'the'. These small grammatical markers are sometimes referred to as grammatical morphemes. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Roger Brown conducted one of the best-known studies that investigated the development of grammatical morphemes in child first language development.

Roger Brown, Ph.D., was known for his work in social psychology and in children's language development. He taught at [Harvard University](#) from 1952 until 1957 and from 1962 until 1994, and at [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) (MIT) from 1957 until 1962

He carried out a longitudinal study (he studied the same learners over a period of time)

Conclusion and Implications for Teaching

Learning more about and understanding second language acquisition research will hopefully encourage you to reflect on your professional experience and teaching practice. Language learning is affected by many factors. Among these are the personal characteristics of the learner, the structure of the native and target languages, opportunities for interaction with speakers of the target language, and access to correction and form-focused instruction. It is clear that teachers do not have control over all these factors. However, a better understanding of them will permit teachers and learners to make the most of the time they spend together in the joint process of teaching and learning a second language.

Other Useful Terms & Facts

Definition of LINGUA FRANCA

plural **lingua francas** or **linguae francae**

play \ˈlɪŋ-ɡwē-ˈfrɑŋ-(,)kē\

1: *often capitalized* : a common language consisting of Italian mixed with French, Spanish, Greek, and Arabic that was formerly spoken in Mediterranean ports

2: any of various languages used as common or commercial tongues among peoples of diverse speech. English is used as a *lingua franca* among many airline pilots.

3: something resembling a common language: movies are the *lingua franca* of the twentieth century — Gore Vida

[Merriam-Webster](#) (retrieved July, 25th, 2017)

Highlights from the TESOL 2014 International Convention (Portland, Oregon)

- The importance of English as the international language of commerce and culture.
- The number of English language learners worldwide is up to 1.5 billion.
- "English is more than a commodity. It has the power to transform nations."
- The demand for qualified English instructors worldwide is astronomical and continues to grow

As of the new millennium, the year 2000, an estimated 1 billion people, or roughly 14% of the world's population, were learning English as a second language. (*Helping English Language Learners Succeed*)

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Suggested Reading

[Second Language Acquisition](#)