

Second Language Acquisition
Fatima Douadi
Université De Bordj Bou Arreridj

الملخص: تحدث لغة ثانية خلافا للغة الأم أصبح ضرورة لكثير من الناس. تعتبر دراسة اكتساب لغة ثانية في بدايتها وتحتاج إلى توضيح العديد من النقاط. الهدف الأولي للباحثين المهتمين بهذا القطاع هو تحسين بيداغوجية اللغة الثانية لذلك نجدهم ينطلقوا من لغة المتعلم كمصدر لجمع المعطيات. اهتموا كذلك بمختلف العوامل المؤثرة في اكتساب هذه اللغة والأخذ بعين الاعتبار الفروقات الموجودة بين المتعلمين وقابليتهم على احتضان هذه اللغة. هذا البحث يهدف إلى التعريف بميدان اكتساب لغة ثانية ومجمع النقاط الممكن ادراجها ضمن هذا الموضوع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتساب لغة ثانية، الباحثون، اللغة، لغة المتعلم

Abstract

Speaking another language other than mother tongue becomes a modern life requirement for the majority of people. The study of SLA is still in its infancy and needs to clarify a variety of points. Researchers interested in the study of L2 acquisition aim to improve L2 pedagogy. The primary source of data for those researchers is learner language. They looked at the factors that influence second language acquisition taking into account the differences found between learners and their capability to acquire that language.

This article tries to give a general view of what is second language acquisition and encompass all possible points that may come under this field.

Key words: second language acquisition, researchers, language, learner language.

Introduction

The acquisition of a second language is complex process which involves many interrelated factors and follows certain principles from the learner's specific motivation and, finally, from the way in which samples of ,or

information about ,the language to be learned are made accessible to the learner. It is commonly agreed upon that foreign language teaching, to be maximally effective, must be adjusted according to a number of factors and principles that affect L2 acquisition. Starting from this belief, we will define ,first ,what do we mean by second language acquisition and then go on to state the goals of SLA research .After that ,we will examine learner language following the history of SLA research and the progress of this field of enquiry. A discussion of internal and external factors affecting second language acquisition will follow. We will end this work with a brief discussion on theoris of language acquisition.

1- What is second language acquisition?

Ellis (2000) defines L2 acquisition as **"the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom, and second language acquisition (SLA) as the study of this"**. Mitchell and Myles (2001:11) define it as: **"the learning of any language to any level, provided only that the learning of the ‘second’ language takes place sometime later than the acquisition of the first language...[that is] any language other thanthe learner’s ‘native language’ or ‘mother tongue’"**.

We understand from these definitions, that there is no distinction between second and foreign language acquisition. Hence the term SLA embraces both untutored (or naturalistic) acquisition and tutored (or classroom) acquisition. Klein (1988) refers to spontaneous language acquisition to denote the acquisition of a second language in every day communication, in a natural fashion, free from systematic guidance. Guided language acquisition, on the other hand, is followed by a tutor. Both Klein an Ellis do not seem to follow Krashen’s distinction between acquisition and learning sine there is no clear evidence that the processes are basically different .

2- Goals of second language acquisition:

One of the goals of SLA is the description of L2 acquisition. A researcher starts by collecting samples of learner language and analyses them carefully He , then ,describes how learner language changes over time .The second goal is to explain and identify the external and internal factors that account for why learners acquire an L2 in the way they do. The explanation extends to answer why there are differences between learners to achieve native like proficiency .For example, second language learners vary on a number of dimensions to do with personality ,motivation ,learning stage style ,age , and so on. Thus, the goals of SLA are to describe and explain the process of L2 acquisition and why some learners seem to be better at it than others .

A considerable question needs to be answered here: what exactly should the researcher look for in samples of learner language ? In general ,SLA has focused on the formal features of language that linguists have traditionally concentrated on (example: pronunciation , vocabulary grammar ,...)

3- The description of learner language:

Ellis (1994) argues that the primary data for many researchers interested in L2 acquisition has been learner language (that is to say, it is a source of information about how learners learn a second language).

If we come back to the history of SLA research, one can say that this field of enquiry has progressed, starting with the study of learners' errors approach. This latter was superseded by the study of developmental patterns, and then the study of variability. The study of pragmatic features comes after.

We may ask ourselves why did researchers suddenly become interested in the study of L2 acquisition, since before the late 1960, there was no empirical study of it ? The first reason ,as Ellis views, is that researchers felt the need to investigate the claims brought by an ample of theories. The second reason has to do with their strong wish to enhance L2 pedagogy.

Before we tackle theories of L2 acquisition, we need first to speak about the different approaches that have taken into account learners' language.

3-1- The study of learners' errors:

Learners' errors can be both of comprehension and production type. An example of the former type is when a learner misunderstands the sentence `Pass me the paper` as `Pass me the pepper` because he is unable to make a difference between the sounds /ei / and /e/. The problem is not to test comprehension, but how can we determine a particular cause of failures of comprehension. **"It is very difficult to assign the cause of failures to an inadequate knowledge of a particular syntactic feature of a misunderstood utterance"**(Corder.1974 cited in Ellis. 1994) .the following instances are production errors:

I goes see Auntie May , instead of, I went to see Auntie May.

Eating ice cream ,instead of, I want to eat an ice cream.

George (1972 cited in Ellis .1994) distinguishes between L2 learners' errors ,which he calls "unwanted forms", children's errors "transitional forms" and adult native speakers' errors as "slips of the tongue" .

Pit Corder (1967 cited in Ellis .1994 :48) pointed out that errors are important for :

a- the teacher :

they make him aware about how much information the learner has learnt .

b- the researcher :

He will recognize how language was learnt ; and

c- the learner :

Errors are seen as devices which help the learner discover the rules of the target language .

Error Analysis as a mode of enquiry was limited in its scope and focused on what learners did wrong, rather than on what made them successful. Such lack of providing a whole picture of how learners acquire an L2 makes researchers feel the need to consider all what constitute learner language, particularly, the description of how learner language develops over time.

3-2- The study of developmental patterns:

Ellis (1994:73) prefers to use the term developmental patterns to include both order and sequence in language acquisition. Hence, in this point ,we are attempting to answer the following questions .

- 1- Do learners acquire some target language features before others ?
- 2- How do they acquire a particular TL feature?

To know how a language is learned ,we need to investigate what learners do when exposed to the L2 .The general pattern of development may begin with a silent period, as it is the case of L1, particularly in children. It makes no difference whether learners are learning in a naturalistic or in classroom learning (that is to say, in both situations learners may pass through a silent period first).During this stage, students may not speak but can respond using a variety of strategies including pointing to an object, picture, or person; performing an act ,such as standing up; gesturing,...Here teachers are advised not to force students to speak until they are ready to do so. Learners then make use of **ready – made chunks** which consist of "**expressions which are learnt as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions**" (Lyons. 1968 cited in Ellis). Gradually ,learners move from **pre - fabricated formulas** to **creative constructions and utterances**. It means that they can usually speak in one- or two –word phrases, and can demonstrate comprehension of new material by giving short answers to wh- questions, and so forth. The point that learners find it difficult to speak in full sentences and their reliance on reduced speech is a common feature of both first and second language acquisition. Brown and Yule (1983:26) direct attention to the fact that native speakers produce short,

phrase -sized chunks and that it is unreasonable to expect foreign learners to produce complete sentences .

In the 1970, studies were conducted to investigate the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes. They were known as **the morpheme studies** (by Dulay 1973; Burt 1974). One research method was to score the presence of certain " grammatical morphemes " in the speech of L2 learners and identify how accurately each feature is used by different learners (as Dulay and Burt did with Spanish-speaking children learning English). These studies, however, have been criticized on a number of grounds. One of the difficulties emerged with the methodology (that is to say, there was doubt about using accuracy order as a basis for discussing acquisition). Another problem is that the research treats acquisition in terms of what Rutherford (1988 cited in Ellis .1994) calls '**accumulated entities**'. This latter involves the mastery of grammatical items one at a time. It, as Ellis argues, has given a little attention to the ways in which learners achieve gradual mastery of linguistic features.

Most scholarship since the 1980s has focused on the sequence, rather than the order , of feature of acquisition. Ellis (1997) views the acquisition of a particular grammatical structure as a process which carries out **transitional constructions** . Dulay ,Burt, and Krashen (1982 cited in Ellis 1997) define transitional constructions as" **the interim language forms that learners use while they are still learning the grammar of a language**". A number of studies have looked into the sequence of acquisition of pronouns by learners of various Indo-European languages. Felix and Hahn (1985, cited in Ellis, 1994); Lightbown and Spada (1990); Broeder, Extra, and Van Hout (1989) and many other researchers found similar sequences of pronouns' acquisition. Evidence was provided to suggest that learner language is systematic. However, it is also obvious that the structure of the acquisition process varies across learners. At any stage of development in the sequence of acquisition, learners show a preference for the use of a given form among others. These facts lead researchers to recognize and find ways of dealing with variation.

3-3-Variability:

Learner language varies much more than native speakers' language.A learner may exhibit very smooth, grammatical language in one context and uninterpretable gibberish in another. Scholars from different traditions have taken opposing views on the importance of this phenomenon. Those who bring a Chomskyan perspective to SLA (as White and Gregg.1989) regard variability as not worthy of systematic

enquiry. Their claim is that the focal goal of SLA research is to build a theory of L2 competence and that variation is a feature of performance rather than of the learner's underlying knowledge system. Researchers gather their data starting from speakers' intuitions regarding what they think is correct in the L2 rather than actual examples of language use. As Gregg (1990 cited in Brown, Malmkjaer, and Williams. 1996) puts it : **" The variabilist is committed to the unprincipled collection of an uncontrolled mass of data, running the real risk that the real object of study will become as Roger Brown once put it `cognitively... repellent`"** .

On the other hand, those who approach variability from a sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic orientation view it as a key indicator of how the situation affects learners' language use. Most research on variability has been done by those who presume it to be meaningful, and conclude that language use can be both variable and systematic. The sociolinguistic approach is a characteristic of natural and native language use as well (Mc Donough.2002). Its goal is to study language in accordance to social context. In responding to Gregg's arguments, Tarone (1990) quotes Romaine (1984), who takes a different view of what Knowledge of a language involves: **"Rule acquisition is not an all or nothing affair ...There may be a number of aspects of the internal workings of a rule ,some of which may be acquired before others. There are also social dimensions of a rule relating to its use"**.

Researchers start giving attention to pragmatic aspects of learner language. This has been motivated by the belief ,as Ellis argues, that the study of learners language requires a consideration of programmatic aspects in their own right .It means simply that to understand how formal linguistic aspects are learnt, the researcher should examine **"the way in which these properties are used in actual communication"** (Ellis. 1991:159). Hence, we conclude that SLA research aims at both describing and explaining learners' linguistic and pragmatic competence. This is what we are going to discover in the following point.

3-4-Pragmatic aspects of learner language:

Pragmatics is simply the study of how language is used in communication. Thomas (1996 cited in Mc Donough2002) points out that it is the study of the ways in which people

- 1- disambiguate meaning in context;
- 2- assign complete meaning;
- 3- distinguish sentence from speaker meaning;
- 4- arrive at particular meanings in listening ;
- 5- act in speech in the way they do

As such, pragmatics is concerned with people's intentions, assumptions, beliefs, goals, and the kinds of actions they perform while using language. It is also concerned with contexts, situations, and settings within which such language uses occur. Speakers, when performing utterances, fulfil two things (1) **interactional acts** and (2) **speech acts**. The former impose structure on the discourse ensuring that one utterance leads smoothly to another, they concern how speakers manage the process of exchanging turns, how they open and close conversation, and how they sequence acts to ensure a coherent conversation. Social actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts. This latter is usually performed within a situation that provides contextual elements that help interpret the speaker's intention.

Studies of interlanguage pragmatics have also given consideration to the pragmatic problems that learners face. Thomas (1996) distinguishes between **sociopragmatic** and **pragmalinguistic** failure. The former implies that a learner fails to respond to a native-speaker utterance. The latter is when a learner performs a speech act but misuses the right linguistic means (that is to say, he doesn't use the appropriate linguistic means to produce the speech act).

4- Factors affecting second language acquisition:

4-1- External factors:

It is an unquestionable matter that SLA occurs only if some external factors are present. Grass (1997) assumes that it is through interaction that learners are "readied" to use input. Alison Mackey and Rebekha Abbuhl (in Sanz, 2005:210) claim that interactionally modified input is more effective than simple input modifications.

Being it behaviorist, mentalist or interactionist, theoretical positions agree absolutely that input is of prime importance for second language acquisition. It is only when these theoretical tenets decide the needed amount and kind of input that controversy arises.

The rise of interest in input and/or interaction (historical overview)

Interest in the subject of input and /or interaction started with Lev Vygotsky in the early 1920's of the last century. His views inspired many other researchers to investigate in this subject. Evelyn Hatch followed his path and in turn inspired Long to suggest his interaction hypothesis. In the remainder of this part, we will deal (in a chronological order) with the most influential researchers who contribute in a noticeable way to the understanding of the concepts of input and/or interaction .

a- Lev Vygotsky (1920) :

He was the catalyst that precedes a flood of investigations and views on interaction. His views are premised on the assumption that social

interaction is the basis of language acquisition. Children learn better when they are guided by more competent adults. Interpersonal communication shapes the child's ideas which are specific to the culture he belongs to. These ideas or habits of mind include among others speech patterns. In other words, it is through cultural mediation that a child internalizes the linguistic knowledge.

Zone of actual development is a key concept used by Vygotsky to refer to the range of activities which a child is unable to do without the assistance of a more capable person. Anita (2001:52) defines this phase as the one **"at which a child can master a task if given appropriate support"**. Once the child learns how to solve problems, those activities become mature and thus will be part of his zone of actual development. As it is clear from this brief summary of Vygotsky's views, social interaction is an important variable that shapes the language acquired by individuals.

b- Evelyn Hatch (1978):

For her interaction is a major determinant in language acquisition, she suggests that when an L2 learner and a native speaker are engaged in a conversation, they are actually building a discourse in a collaborative fashion. The native speaker alters his speech to be clear and to support the learner. This one, from his part, uses elements from the discourse and builds a scaffold for his subsequent performance. Thus scaffolding constitutes one aspect of how input and interaction shape SLA. Hatch believes too that syntactic structures and meaning likewise are learnt through conversation, this is clear from the following statement :

" one learns how to do conversation , one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction, syntactic structures develop" (Hatch 1978: 404 cited in Ellis 1985). Hatch is among the researchers who claim that the order of L2 acquisition is regulated by the kind of conversations led with the L2 learners. As the learners have limited resources in language, their interlocutors appeal to restrictions in the input so that it fits this level and this makes discourse somehow predictable. Hatch argues that it is exactly this predictability which affects the order of acquisition.

c- Stephen Krashen:

In 1985, he advanced his **input hypothesis** which assumes that SLA occurs only when a learner is able to understand what is said in the second language, that is if the input is comprehensible. The mechanism whereby an input is made receivable is by providing : **" structures that are a bit beyond our current level , we move from i, our current level to i + 1 the next level along the natural order "**(Krashen 1985:2 cited in Ellis 1997).

The use of contextual and extralinguistic information promote too the comprehensibility of the input. Krashen (1985) argues that "**Speaking is the result of acquisition and not its cause**" (that is to say, it is comprehensible input and not production that leads to acquiring a second language) .If some one is asked to produce a given utterance, this doesn't imply that he is acquiring language. Instead if the L2 learner is exposed to a comprehensible speech and tries to understand it, he will be actually acquiring the language. Karashen's views on SLA were and still are very influential .Many researchers based their works on the input hypothesis either by supporting it and adding other elements or by criticizing it and suggesting alternatives.

d-Michael Long (1981):

He was a student of Hatch and a proponent of the interactionist hypothesis (which synthesizes Hatch's views).Long conducted theoretical and empirical investigations on native- nonnative interaction. He claimed that in order to make speech comprehensible (and beside the i+1 strategy),we need to modify interaction by providing repetitions, clarification requests ...In this way, Long has extended Krashen's input hypothesis by incorporating Hatch's emphasis on interaction..

e-Merril Swain (1995):

She was not fully satisfied with Krashen's hypothesis and with his claims that speaking is the result of acquisition and not its cause. She suggested, in 1995, a missing factor in second language acquisition which is **the comprehensible output**. She argued that the lack of grammatical accuracy is mainly due to the lack of opportunities to use the language and produce an output.This was concluded after the observation of Canadian emersion students who were exposed to abundant comprehensible input and ,in spite of this, were unable to produce grammatically accurate output.The comprehensible output or in other words, the opportunity to produce language is beneficial in three ways:

- 1 – It represents a chance to notice the gaps between what an L2 learner wants to say and what he can say.
- 2 – The production of language is an opportunity as well to form hypotheses and test them, hence, the process of language learning is enhanced.
- 3 – The comprehensible output is a push to use metalanguage (meta-talk) to analyze with native speakers or peers the structures and check their correctness .

Swain's accounts of language acquisition are actually completions of the gaps in krashen's hypothesis rather than contradictory ones. They emphasize the importance of an output production in parallel with getting

an input and not content oneself with just understanding the L2. Gass (in Kaplan, 2002:180) views that output pushes learners to focus on the syntax of an utterance and formulate hypotheses about how the target language works unlike receiving input which involves only comprehension and this later often requires little syntactic organization.

2-Instruction:

One of the major issues dealt with in SLA studies is the impact of formal instruction on the order and rate of acquisition. Let's remind that by formal instruction we mean mainly teaching grammar despite the fact that phonology and lexis are included as well but not with the same intensity as grammar .

Most of the teaching methods share the assumption that in order to aid a learner to internalize the rules of target language, he should first be aware of the nature of these rules. Yet, these methods do not handle this awareness rising in the same manner. Differences do exist in many aspects, especially regarding the degree of explicitness in which these rules are presented and the intensity of practice. In the light of what precedes it becomes convenient to ask two questions :

1 -Does direct consciousness raising of the rules give good results?

In other words, is form – focused instruction effective?

If we assume that it is effective, what kinds of form – focused instruction produces the best outcomes(Ellis 1997).

1 – is form-focused instruction effective?

One of the researchers who investigated the effectiveness of formal instruction is Teresa Pica (1983). Her strategy relied on comparing the development of tutored and untutored L2 learners. Three groups were observed : the first including untutored learners, the second tutored ones and the third was a mixed one (that is to say, both tutored and untutored ones). After observation, her conclusion was that when the grammatical feature is formally simple and has an easy form-function relationship, as in plural formation with the morpheme - s , accuracy is enhanced with instruction .And if the grammatical feature is simple but having a complex form-function as in progressive – ing, the learners may internalize the rule but not necessarily use it, so errors are likely to happen in this case. Whereas if the grammatical feature is not salient and if it is complex functionally speaking as with the articles “a” and “ the”, instruction seems to be fruitless .

From what precedes we deduce that the grammatical feature is said to be acquired only if the rule is internalized, that is to say, if the learner is engaged in **a system learning** and not by rote learning of chunks of

language structures (this means, when the learner is engaged in “ **item-learning** “)

Manfred Pienemann (1985 cited in Ellis.1997) led another experimental study for the same goal which is to test whether instruction has any impact on the sequence of acquisition or not .

This time the study on German-word order, Starting from the findings of this study and together with other studies , Pienemann suggested **the teachability hypothesis**. According to this hypothesis, the effects of instruction can be maximised if the learner is ready to acquire a grammatical structure and this when his interlanguage is approximately in the same stage in which the structure is acquired in natural setting . In this way, the sequence of acquisition won't be altered but instead, it is speeded up. Thus , Pienemann's research is an additional evidence for the effectiveness of from focused instruction . Yet , a question may arise here concerning the durability of these effects and what are the variables that may guarantee the long lasting effects of instruction.

Ellis(1997) proposes three possible factors : the first is the nature of instruction that affects in many ways SLA . The second factor is the nature of the grammatical structure . When a learner is engaged in system learning, there are more chances for the instruction effects to be long lasting than it is the case if the L2 learner is engaged in item learning . The third possible factor is the frequency of opportunities afforded by communication to hear and use given grammatical structures. To conclude, we can say that evidence was provided by a number of researchers that instruction can aid SLA not by altering the route of second language acquisition, but by speeding it up. It also enhances accuracy and enables the learners to get rid of established errors .However , one should bear in mind that these beneficial effects are not always assured by direct teaching nor is the durability of these effects.

The other question that arises when investigating the role of formal instruction on SLA is : what type of instruction is most beneficial ? The point in asking such question is to guide the teachers and provide them with the right methods and techniques. Form –focused instruction has a number of options, each views instruction from a particular perspective . Let's consider a couple of these options.

a- Input-based versus production-based practice: In language pedagogy, there is no consensus on where the emphasis should be. Is it input processing that facilitates SLA or is it output production that results in better effects? In other words, what are the techniques that work best: to expose L2 learners to the input including the target structures or to

prompt them to produce an output by doing substitution drills, blank filling , exercises ... ?

Bill Van Patten and Teresa (1993 cited in Ellis 1994) led an experimental study in which they compared the final outcome of two groups of learners' instruction. One of these groups has benefited from production based instruction and the other from input based instruction. The final results revealed that input-based instruction proved to be far more beneficial and the L2 learners were more proficient whether in comprehension or in production .One of the reasons for which input-based instruction is more beneficial lies in the important role of conscious noticing that learners are engaged in during this kind of instruction .

b- The second perspective from which form-based instruction can be seen is the need to provide both **positive** and **negative evidence** in order to raise the consciousness of the L2 learner. Putting it in another way, the input to which the L2 learner is exposed should include both grammatical structure and hints to what is ungrammatical (through correction) so that the L2 learner becomes aware that particular grammatical structures do exist .

Martha Trahey and Lydia white (1993 cited in Ellis 1997) designed an experimental investigation to test whether positive evidence is sufficient to make the eleven year old French learners of the English acquire subject –adverb – verb-object (SAVO) sentences. This study led to the conclusion that supplying L2 learners with a flood of positive evidence of a given grammatical feature (input flooding) may prove to be insufficient and thus requires reinforcement with negative evidence. As learners would never guess the ungrammaticality of some structures unless they are provided with a negative feedback in the form of the teacher's correction or overt explanations of some facts in language.

These two insights suggested by researchers in addition to many other ideas are useful contributions to the understanding of grammatical features acquisition and how this acquisition is facilitated by instructional options.However, this doesn't imply that the findings of any research are applicable to all L2 learners. Some variables pertaining to individual differences have to do with the degree of effectiveness of a given type of instruction. That is to say ,what works with a learner doesn't necessarily work with another to the nature of their language aptitude and to the unique predispositions of any learner. It is worth to note at the end of this part, that besides the possibility of acquiring a second language through direct instruction , learners can be trained to develop strategies that help

them to become autonomous and consequently take the responsibility of their own learning

3-Social factors:

It has been widely agreed on that social factors have an important role to play in SLA. Yet, when it comes to explaining the mechanisms whereby this impact is made, divergence ensues. Each account is given starting from a particular perspective and entailing different related concepts.

Based on Labov's notion of style shifting , Elaine Tarone (1982 cited in Ellis 1994) suggested **the stylistic continuum**. This key concept involves the ability of L2 learners to use a number of different styles depending on the conditions of the L2 use and the addressee's status. The L2 learner tends to use a careful style with unfamiliar addressee, he utilizes the vernacular style. This means that the L2 learner strives to be accurate in careful (or superordinate) style by making the right choices of language forms. And in vernacular style, he makes spontaneous but not necessarily correct choices. For Tarone, the learner's style is not stable, rather it swings between the two extreme points (careful or vernacular) depending on the contextual situation. The learner's competence then is not tied to a single style but to both, and it is composed of sets of linguistic norms required by both styles. This last point explains the variability of the interlanguage. The competence of the learner is certainly different from that of the native speaker, Still, it is based on the same principle which is making the right choice of style for the appropriate situation . Though Tarone's view is meant to show the impact of social circumstances on linguistic choices , she acknowledges that style shifting is also determined by psycholinguistic mechanisms.

John Schumann (1986): His **acculturation model** has accounted for the causal social variables that determine the SLA. Central to this model is the idea of social distance , that is the extent to which individuals succeed to be part of the L2 group and get adapted to the new culture. In some situations, the L2 learners and the native speakers hold a negative attitude towards each other and prefer preservation and enclosure instead of social integration. In these situations, either the native speakers feel subordinate to the L2 group or they feel dominant and in both cases a failure in acculturation ensues and a tendency is noticed to avoid contact or at least diminish its amount with the other group. This resulting failure affects language by impeding any progress in learning and a pidginization takes place instead. Schumann make use of the term pidgin because the learner's language remains so simple as if

it has fossilized at a very early stage of development . Emmitt, Matthew, Linda and John share Schumann's idea and claim that attitudes towards the second language have a big influence on the learning process. They add that **“Negative attitudes towards the speakers of a language, the language itself and the cultures associated with the language will be detrimental to the learning process.”**

Bonny Pierce (1995 cited in Ellis.1997) used the notion of **social identity** to stress the diverse , contradictory and dynamic core that any person has rather than the unique , coherent and fixed core as it is conceived by humanists. **“ The person takes up different subject positions – teacher , mother , manager , critic- some positions of which may be in conflict with others”**(Pierce 1995 cited in Ellis.1997). For Pierce, every individual should assert a social identity for himself and this can only be done if the learner runs conversations in such a way that he places himself in a powerful position rather than a marginalized one. Pierce used the expression **“subject of the discourse”** to refer to the powerful position and **“ subject to the discourse “** for the marginalised position.Thus , the role of the L2 speaker won't be just that of processing input data but the one of struggling to impose himself in a particular social order .The other notion used by Pierce is **investment** which refers to the effort employed by the L2 learner to increase his cultural capital and this can be achieved if he possesses both the knowledge and the modes of thought that allow him to act appropriately in accordance with any social context

4-2- Internal factors:

Whereas the study of learner- external factors is primarily concerned with how do learners learn a second language, studies of learner – internal factors try to show how do learners gain competence in the target language. In other words, given effective input and instruction , with what internal resources and mechanisms do learners process this input to produce a rule-governed interlanguage ?

1-Language transfer:

One should not confuse between **“ interference “**, where learners' old habits get in the way of his new habits, and **transfers**. The study of transfer constitutes the study of errors (**negative transfer**) where the learner's L1 is one of the sources of error in language learning .**Positive transfer** , on the other hand , means that , in some cases , the learner's L1 can facilitate L2 acquisition. For instance , English learners of French would not find difficulties as would English learners of Japanese, simply because of the nature of similarities found between French and

English (such as the position of the article). Hence, to the extent that two languages have similarities , there will be a greater facilitation . as Steinberg , Nagata and Aline point out “ **the higher the similarity the faster the learning**” (2001 : 233) .

2-Cognitive accounts of second language acquisition:

We have mentioned that language transfer has been considered as a cognitive process where L2 learners use their L1 in the process of learning the L2, and in the process of understanding and producing messages in the L2. A number of other cognitive accounts play a major role in the acquisition process. Ellis (1994) distinguishes between linguistic and cognitive accounts of second language acquisition .The former involves the description of learners' competence which is regarded as “ an abstract system of rules and items “ that are basis of actual performance . The latter focus on the extent to which the learners has achieved mastery over both form and properties of language and the mental processes.

A number of other factors are responsible for the differences found between learners, in terms of their rate of development and their ultimate level of achievement. These factors include age, aptitude, learning styles, motivation, personality, and so on. Thus, they try to give an answer to the following question: why do some learners acquire L2 better than others?

5-Language acquisition theories:

Language acquisition theories have been influenced especially by linguistic and psychological schools of thought .Most of the theories may be considered in both L1 and L2 acquisition:

Geoff (2004) quotes Long description of second language acquisition theory as the one which: “ **encompasses the simultaneous and sequential acquisition and loss of second ,third ,fourth ,etc .languages and dialects by children and adults learning naturalistically or with the aid of instruction ,as individuals or in groups ,in second or foreign language settings** “(Long 1993).

A theory should have an explanatory power. It means that, as Geoff claims ,the best theories are the ones which provide the most generally applicable explanations . We will attempt to outline a number of influential theories starting with the **Naturalistic approach** where we will mainly discuss Krashen's theory. The second theory is the **Universalist one** and particularly **Universal Grammar**, followed by the **Cognitive theory** and finally the **Social Interactionist theory** .

5-1-Creative construction or the Naturalistic approach :

Creative construction theory (or as Dr .Emma Alicia Garza calls it **Nativist theory**) views language acquisition as innately determined and that human beings are born with a built-in device that influences and helps them to acquire language. Chomsky (1965 cited in Alexandra.2002) claims the existence of innate properties of language that explain a child's mastery of his /her native language in a short time despite the highly abstract nature of the rules of language. Such innate knowledge, as Chomsky argues, is included and embodied in a "little black box" which he calls **the language acquisition device (LAD)**. This latter determines what children acquire, and the fact that they acquire much of their language ability before coming to school supports the innate structures argument given by the nativist theory .

Mc Neill (1966) considers the LAD as consisting of four innate linguistic properties :

- 1- the ability to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds in the environment;
- 2- the ability to organize linguistic events into various classes that can be refined later;
- 3- knowledge that only a certain kind of linguistic system is possible and that other kinds are not; and
- 4- the ability to engage in constant evaluation of the developing linguistic system in order to construct the simplest possible system out of the linguistic data that are encountered .

Emma explains that learners build their grammar by actively listening to the language around them and trying to determine the patterns in the utterances. She adds that their language progresses and develops in predictable stages. The learner would not respond to error correction unless he is developmentally ready .

1-1- Krashen's theory of second language acquisition:

Krashen's theory is one of the most well- known theories of second language acquisition and which has important implications for language teaching. He proposes five interrelated hypotheses that are listed below:

1-1-1-The acquisition –learning hypothesis :

According to Krashen , there are two independent systems of second language performance .The **acquired system** and the **learned system** . The former is a subconscious process, very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language . Learning, on the other hand, is the product of formal instruction (that is to say, what occurs at school in an academic setting). It is a conscious process in which "learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process" (Brown. 2002 cited in Alexandra).

1-1-2- The monitor hypothesis :

The monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. Language is normally produced using our acquired linguistic competence. The learning system performs the role of **the monitor** or **the editor**. After we produce some language using the acquired system, we sometimes use our learned system to correct errors. Lightbown and Spada (1995 cited in Alexandra 2002 -2003) report that three conditions are necessary for monitor use : 1. the second language learner has sufficient time at his /her disposal ; 2. he /she focuses on form or thinks about correctness; 3- he/ she knows the rules . Krashen further suggests that there is individual variation among language learners with regard to monitor use. He distinguishes those learners that use the monitor all the time (over –users) ; those learners who have not learned or who prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under –users) ; and those learners that use the monitor appropriately (optimal users). Evaluating a person's psychological profile can help to determine to what group he belongs .Accordingly, extroverts are usually under-users, while introvert and perfectionist people are over-users. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the monitor .

1-1-3- The natural order hypothesis :

This hypothesis claims that grammatical rules and structures are acquired in certain order that is predictable. Some of them are early-acquired and some are late-acquired .

1-1-4- The Input hypothesis :

This hypothesis contends that learners acquire language by intaking and understanding language that is a "little beyond" their current level of competence. Consequently, ,Krashen believes that if a learner is at stage "i", then acquisition takes place when he / she is exposed to **comprehensibleinput** that belongs to level **i+1**. ,Krashen suggests that natural communicative input is the key to designing syllabus, since learners differ at the level of their linguistic competence .Doing so ,learners will receive some **i+1**input that is appropriate for his / her current stage of linguistic competence .

1-1-5- The affective filter hypothesis :

This last hypothesis includes Krashen's view that a number of **affective variables** play a role in second language acquisition .Thus ,learners with high motivation ,self –confidence, a good self image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. The negative emotions ,on the other band ,can raise the **affective filter** and form a `mental block` that prevents comprehensible

input from being used for acquisition. That is to say, though there is a comprehensible input, the affective filter will play the role of a barrier to prevent such input from reaching the Language Acquisition Device.

Krashen's theory has been hotly disputed. Klein (1988:29) does not consider such a theory as a model of language acquisition in general. He argues that it lacks the attempt to specify the rules governing the process or the factors responsible for the outcome. Rather, it presents hypotheses about the manner in which language acquisition can be influenced by conscious awareness. Mc Laughlin (1987 cited in Alexandra) has criticized the unclear distinction between acquisition and learning dichotomy. According to Brown, (2002, cited in Alexandra 2003-2004) Krashen's formula $i+1$ raises the question how i and 1 should be defined. Furthermore, Krashen states that after the silent period, speech will emerge to the learner as a result of comprehensible input. What is vague for Brown is that no information is provided about what will happen to the learners, for whom speech will not emerge and "for whom the silent period might last forever" (Brown 2002)

5-2- Universalist theory :

Universalist theory defines linguistic universals from two perspectives. The first perspective looks at surface features of a wide – range of languages to find out how languages vary and what they have in common. It considers system external factors or input as the basis. These universals are known as **typological universals**. The second perspective looks at in- depth analysis of the properties of a single language to discover the highly abstract principles of grammar. This is what we call **Universal Grammar**.

2-1- Universal Grammar theory :

Chomsky's universal Grammar theory developed in the 1980s, called **principles and parameters theory**, claims that language is acquired through innateness. Cook (cited in Ellis .1999) explains Chomsky's view of universal Grammar and says "**The Language properties inherent in the mind make up `Universal Grammar` ,which consists not of particular rules or of a particular language ,but a set of general principles that apply to all languages "**. It means simply that the child possesses innate and universal principles that help him to learn the grammar of his mother tongue. Ellis (1999:122) argues that this fact exists because the data available from the input are insufficient to make the learner know and discover certain rules.

Universal Grammar doesn't constrain the form which the grammars of individual languages can take directly. Rather, it sets parameters which must then be fixed according to the input data that the child obtains. Let

us give examples to illustrate what Chomsky means by principles and parameters .A sentence .such as :Is Sam is the cat that black? is impossible in any human language .The reason is that "**elements in the sentence can only be moved around to form question according to the structure of the sentence not its linear order**" (Cook 2002). Chomsky calls this principle **structure dependency principle**. As we have said earlier ,such principles are built-in to the human mind. One of the parameters proposed by Chomsky is **the pro-drop parameter**. Some languages, say English ,French, German, must have sentences consisting of subjects (example :he speaks; Il parle; Er sprich), whereas others ,such as Italian and Arabic ,do not have compulsory subjects in their sentences (example: parla ;yatakallamu). Hence, languages can be pro- drop (they permit no subject) or non –pro drop ones where subjects are not obligatory. Dr .Pius Ten Hacken (2002) explains the aspects of principles and parameters in the following figure :

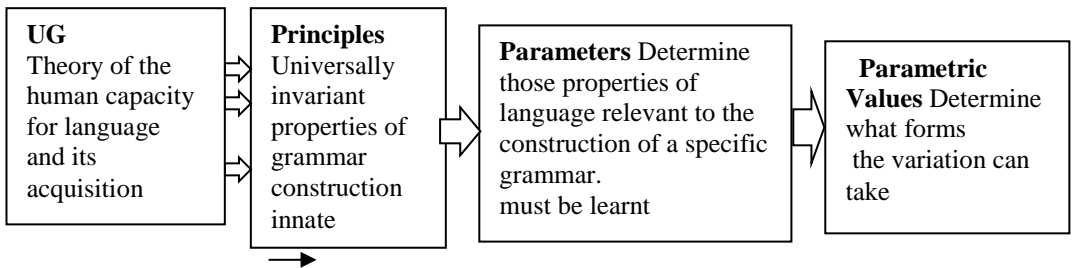


Figure2-Principles and parameters and setting model (Hacken.2002)

This is for the role of Universal Grammar in L1 acquisition. For L2 acquisition, the main question has been whether adult L2 learners have access to UG .To answer such question ,we will examine three hypotheses to explain the role of UG in SLA .

a- "no access" hypothesis:UG is totally inaccessible to the adult L2 learner. Learning takes place in terms of non-linguistic strategies (they use their general learning strategies).

b- "partial access" hypothesis: UG is partially available to the learner; only that part of UG which has been activated and used in first language can be used again in L2 acquisition. The other part must be learnt in terms of non –linguistic learning strategies. Hence ,L2 acquisition is partly regulated by UG and partly general learning strategies .

c- "full access" hypothesis :L2 acquisition is just like L1 acquisition. UG is fully available. L2 learners apply the mental faculty of UG to the

L2 input and acquires a grammar consisting of the same principles and parameters as the L1 speaker .

Although researchers have used UG to generate a number of interesting hypotheses about second language acquisition, UG does not claim to account for the whole of language or even the whole of the grammar of a language. In other words, Chomsky studied the core grammar of the English language (syntax) and neglected the peripheral grammar.

5-3- The cognitive theory:

Cognitive theory is based on the work of psychologists .It views second language acquisition as the building up of a knowledge system that can later be called on automatically for speaking and understanding .It means that the first thing the learner has to do is to build up general knowledge of the language he wants to understand and produce (knowledge of grammatical rules ,vocabulary ...). After a lot practice and experience , he will be able to use certain parts of his knowledge very quickly and without realizing that he did so. Gradually, such use becomes automatic. During this process of automatization, the learner organizes and restructures new information that is acquired. Through this process of restructuring, the learner links new information to old one and achieves increasing degrees of mastery in the second language. This idea supports **Mc Laughlin's Attention –Processing Model** where he distinguishes between controlled processes and automatic ones. According to Brown (2002 cited in Alexandra.2002)"**the automatizing of this multiplicity of data is accomplished by a process of restructuring in which the components of a task are co-ordinated, integrated ,or reorganized into new units, thereby allowing the ...old components to be replaced by a more efficient procedure"**

In short, the cognitivists claim that language acquisition can be automatically attained. However, it is still not clear (as Alexandra puts it) what kinds of structures will be automatized through practice. Besides, what L1 structures can be transferred to L2 are not clearly accounted for.

5-4- Social interactionist theory :

Social interactionist theory supports the view that the development of language comes from the early interactions between children and adults. Glew (1998) stresses the importance that learners have to be pushed in their negotiation of meaning to produce comprehensible output. Language learners need many opportunities for using the target language in order to develop competence. Vygotsky (1978) places an emphasis on the role of **shared language** in the development of thought and language. The term refers to social interaction. Vygotsky believes

that learners bring two levels of development to the learning: an actual developmental level and a potential one. These two levels are referred to as the **Zone of Proximal Development**. Learners can move from actual development to proximal development through social interactions with others.

Conclusion

In this article, we have dealt with Second language acquisition, which is regarded as a complex process where most researchers relied on findings of L1 to build new theories and hypothesis about L2. We have said that this field started with the study of learners' errors approach, followed by the developmental patterns one. Variability approach came later and was superseded by the pragmatic approach. External and internal factors that affect SLA were also viewed. What is worth to keep in mind is the fact that individual learners' differences influence the rate of development and level of achievement. A number of theories of language acquisition have been tackled too.

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