

SIX ELEMENTS AFFECTING LANGUAGE LEARNER SYSTEMS

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Abstract

There has been a lot of discussion about understanding and describing second language acquisition. This document offers a summary of error analysis in the field. It presents a new and intriguing angle on learner English in comparison to previous studies on second language acquisition. Research on mistakes made by child language learners focuses on the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in learning a language. When acquiring a second language, there are six factors that can impact and define the systems of the language learner, such as universal hierarchy of difficulty, intralingual interference, sociolinguistic context, modality, age, successions of approximative systems. Viewing the rough language systems of learners not as issues to be eliminated, but as important phases in learning the target system, could lead to a better comprehension of language overall and a more compassionate method of teaching it.

Keywords: language learner system, second language acquisition

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A. INTRODUCTION

The discussion about second language acquisition and its description and understanding has been extensively argued. The ideas of second language acquisition have historically been enhanced by contributions from psychology. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of linguistic paradigms for studies on second languages. Having this knowledge, a few linguists conducted research. Investigations into second language learning could require the development of new theories.

This paper gives a summary of error analysis in the field. It also presents an intriguing viewpoint in learner English compared to previous studies on second language acquisition. The focus of the research is on the mistakes made by child learners, highlighting the different cognitive and linguistic activities that seem to be involved in the process of acquiring language. According to Corder (Richards 1997), errors made by learners in second language acquisition are influenced by both the learner's knowledge and the methods used to learn the second language. When discussing the learning of a second language, there are seven factors that can impact and define the learner's language systems, including language transfer, intralingual interference, sociolinguistic context, modality, age, sequence of approximate systems, and universal hierarchy of difficulty.

B. The Study of Learners' Approximative System

Several researchers are dedicated to studying the process of children acquiring a second language. Boaz highlights the previous examination of observation in second language acquisition. Boaz (1889) highlighted the noticeable changes in how learners (linguists) perceive sound in unfamiliar languages. Richards (1997) suggests that learners interpret sounds in new languages based on their native language or other languages they have previously encountered. Understanding both the language systems of the first language and second language is crucial due to the significance of language as a system. These linguistic systems may result in a novel integrated system incorporating characteristics from each system. Lado (1957) finds the idea of both language systems interesting enough to be highlighted. He has a tendency to examine the difference between two

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languages, known as ¹contrastive analysis (CA). Nevertheless, CA is not the sole factor that plays a role in second language acquisition. Some language experts use the abbreviation EA for ¹error analysis. Stevens (1969) suggested that errors should not be seen as obstacles to overcome, but rather as usual and unavoidable aspects revealing learners' strategies. Alternatively, Nemser's (1971) study focused on gathering and assessing interference data regarding errors in languages. Mistakes that did not align consistently with the structures of the ¹native or target language were generally disregarded. Recent studies mainly concentrate on the learner as the source of grammar creation, resulting in the creation of terms like error analysis, idiosyncratic dialects, interlanguage, ¹approximative systems, transitional competence, and dialects. The meanings of those terms appear very alike. As per Harsono (2009), learner language is a term used for the language a learner is acquiring that is not their native or ²target language. The learner's language is positioned between their native language and the language they are aiming to learn.

According to Nemser (1971), approximative systems in learners are described as the linguistic system they use when attempting to speak the target language. The learner goes through several 'approximative systems' before reaching complete proficiency in the target language. The closer the learner language gets to the target language as the learner continues to learn and improve in the target language. This is the reason why Nemser gave the name 'approximative systems' to this specific learner language. He thought that eventually a successful language learner will master the target language fully. Roughly 5% of all language learners belong to the category of highly successful learners. Interlanguage, idiosyncratic dialects, and transitional competence are distinct from Nemser's approximative systems as they do not always involve moving closer to the target language (Harsono 2009). Furthermore, Cook (1999) also mentions that in L2 learning, Nemser's concept of the approximative system reflects the independent grammars assumption: 'Learner speech at a given time is the patterned product of a linguistic system, La [approximative language], distinct from Ls [source language] and Lt [target language] and internally structured' (Nemser, 1971). Students possess a language understanding that is

distinct from both their first language (L1) and second language (L2), forming a unique grammar of its own. The approximative system of L2 learners moves towards native competence by approximating the target native speaker system. Richards (1997: 54) points out the lack of research on learners' approximative systems and proposes that six factors may impact and define these systems in second language learners. They are:

a. Universal Hierarchy of Difficult

This aspect relates to the inherent challenge for individuals with specific phonological, syntactic, or semantic elements and formations. In the process of learning a new language, there is a ranking system in place for how adults and children acquire different language features. The encoding of a specific category in a language is connected to how features naturally emerge, according to Bell and Gilbert. Some forms may pose a challenge for learners from any background. For instance, English phoneme pairs such as /v/ -- /ð/ and /f/ -- /θ/ are difficult to differentiate for both native and non-native speakers. According to Richards (1984: 13), these forms could be referred to as a universal hierarchy of difficulty, which should be considered for learners with a specific language background.

The idea of difficulty is likely to impact the learner's approach to learning and their communication method. The learning strategy is how the learner organizes perception, while the communication strategy is how he organizes production. Richards (1984: 13) clarifies that by concentrating on learning strategies, learners focus on the signals they use to recognize various elements in the new language. For instance, the presence of cognates, derivatives, and loan words can aid in recognizing certain components in the new language, just as when the target language mirrors the structure of the native language.

Moreover, the challenges faced by the learner will also vary based on the extent and type of proficiency they have in the second language. Knowledge of a second language involves using existing data to understand new elements like plural markers, tense markers, and word order constraints.

Additionally, psycho-linguists have categorized challenges in language acquisition based on factors like sentence length, processing time, derivational complexity, types of embedding, number of transformations, and semantic

complexity. Nonetheless, experimental proof has not verified a clear connection between the simplicity of understanding an utterance by an adult listener and the quantity of rules employed by linguists when describing the utterance.

The following discussion focuses on a learner's understanding and the level of effort put into understanding, which can be compared to their output. Students might opt to not use a particular word or phrase that they struggle with (during speaking) and choose to say "I'm going to telephone you tonight" instead of "I'll telephone you tonight". The reason why initially learned words/structures are frequently used and difficult to replace with later taught ones may be due to ease and efficiency. For instance, the utilization of either simple present or present continuous. Once the present continuous (or simple present) is brought up, it tends to be overused.

According to Richards (1984: 14), patterns learned initially take precedence over patterns learned later due to the simple and convenient nature of these foundational structures. This type of interference within the structure will occur even in the presence of a contrasting inter structure.

b. Intralingual Interference

Richards (1997) explains that another factor affecting and defining second language learner systems is intralingual interference. It pertains to learner-created items that are influenced by limited exposure to the target language rather than mirroring the structure of the mother tongue. Bordag (2004) echoes Richards' (1971) definition of intralingual interference, which involves rule learning features like inaccurate generalizations, incomplete rule application, and difficulty learning when rules are applicable. Overgeneralization is a common example of intralingual interference.

c. Sociolinguistic Situation

Another important aspect is the sociolinguistic context. Various language use settings lead to varying levels and forms of language acquisition. These differences can be identified by looking at how the socio-cultural environment influences the learner's language skills and by examining how the learner interacts with the target language community and the language markers associated with these connections and identities. They consider both the learner's specific reasons for learning the second language and the impact of the socio-cultural environment.

Ervin and Osgood (1997: 7) base their argument on the idea that varying

language learning environments can lead to different language acquisition processes. For instance, two languages could be acquired within one socio-cultural environment or in separate environments. If the learner acquires languages in the same environment, they could form a specific kind of semantic framework. Consider a scenario where a child is brought up speaking two languages at home. English word door and Indonesian word *pintu* can be associated with the same idea (compound bilingualism).

Alternatively, the two words could be kept in different storage locations (coordinate bilingualism). Despite being criticized for its simplistic nature in explaining actual linguistic variations, it remains beneficial for sociolinguistic analysis. In a broader sense, the emphasis on the connection between learning opportunities and the learner's evolving system is valuable, as it prompts an examination of whether learning is confined to the school curriculum (English as a foreign language) or primarily occurs outside of the academic setting (English as a second language), and how these distinctions impact the learner's language development.

Taking into account the sociolinguistic setting also involves incorporating the overall motivational factors that impact language acquisition. Psychologists have connected the types of language learning accomplished to how the language aligns with the learner's needs and perceptions. The instrumental form of motivation is defined as pushing a learner to learn a language for mainly practical reasons, rather than for connecting with people from a different cultural and linguistic background. It is considered suitable for short-term objectives but not suitable for the strenuous process of learning a language that requires integrative motivation. When examining the connection between the learner and the target language community, it is important to look at non-standard dialect and immigrant language acquisition as examples of how social processes impact language transmission and usage.

The simplification phenomenon in certain language contact cases, like removing the copula, reducing morphological and inflectional systems, and simplifying grammar, could also have social reasons. When it comes to sharing basic information using visual cues instead of language, tourists in foreign countries

must focus on learning vocabulary and word order. The impact of the native language on the learner's language can differ depending on the sociolinguistic context. When explaining interference, one must consider how it can vary based on the medium, style, or register the speaker is using.

d. Modality

The form of learning involves experiencing the target language and producing it. Both the processes of production and perception may require the development of two systems that partially intersect with each other. Vildomec noted that bilingual interference typically occurs more in the speaker's production of language rather than in their comprehension. Frequently, individuals mention experiencing elements of their native language creeping into their speech, however, this is seldom observed in their comprehension of a different language. Two systems can be internalized in the target language based on the modality. In the productive mode, phonological substitution varied based on whether the learner was mimicking heard utterances or generating speech on their own. It has been suggested that certain phonological features in first language acquisition exist because their acoustic correlates align with a specific neural acoustic detector.

Additional characteristics are present due to the ease of performing a specific movement with the human vocal system; these characteristics align with a constraint on articulation. Additional characteristics may have corresponding articulation that is simple to execute and lead to easily detectable acoustic features. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that second language learners develop distinctions through auditory cues, articulatory cues, or a combination of both. George explains that learning challenges can arise from the way "is" and "has" are introduced in an audio-lingual context, where they are often pronounced as /z/ when unstressed. This can result in them being perceived as one word and lead to sentences like "She is a book" or "Her name has Sita."

e. Age

Certain factors related to a child's ability to learn evolve with age and can impact their acquisition of language. A child's ability to remember more improves as they grow older. He gains more abstract ideas and employs them to make sense of his experiences. Lenneberg identifies a stage of initial language learning,

believed to be influenced by biology, starting when the child begins walking and lasting until puberty.

Certain traits of child language are believed to be connected to the specific way in which their memory and cognitive processes function during childhood. Brown and Bellugi connect elements of children's language to constraints on the length of utterances caused by the child's limited ability to think ahead beyond a few words. Therefore, in certain aspects, adults are more equipped for language learning compared to children. Adults possess stronger memories, a larger reservoir of abstract concepts for learning, and an enhanced capacity for forming new concepts. Nevertheless, children are superior at mimicking speech sounds. The main focus of adult second language acquisition is on expanding vocabulary. The methods adults use to learn language may focus more on vocabulary than syntax.

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A common set of rules would serve as the base, with specific rules for each code identified through differentiation. While mastering the English negative system, he constructed sentences similar to those made by children learning English as their first language (e.g. I not like that), even though in Norwegian the negative element typically comes after the verb (e.g. I like that not). When mastering the question system, he started with information from two languages, sometimes addressing them separately and other times as a unified code. Children who are in the process of learning their first language naturally are likely to use similar strategies in acquiring a second language. Learning one's native language takes time and can continue until a person is 10 years old or beyond.

f. Successions of Approximative Systems

The order of approximative systems is a factor that can affect and define the second language learner systems. Richards (1984: 11) states that these systems tend to be unstable in certain individuals, as these individuals consistently progress in acquiring the target language. Furthermore, each individual's newfound language skills differ from those of others. It indicates that the learning of different vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structures differs among individuals. This is because the conditions for learning a language on an individual level are always different.

The focus of many studies on second language learners is on the learners' ability

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to produce language rather than on their understanding of it. This raises a question about whether the grammar that a learner uses to comprehend speech is identical to the grammar used to produce speech, as mentioned earlier that modality can impact the system's development. Assuming that the learner comprehends Standard English, it can be beneficial to acknowledge that they may produce a considerable number of nonstandard sentences. This indicates a difference between his ability to understand rules (receptive competence) and his ability to apply rules (productive competence). Additionally, many elements in the formation of a second language rule system are seen to undergo a phase where they are alternately included and excluded. This implies that a grammar including the rule for these features could also specify that it was not mandatory.

Additionally, Nemser (1969) has proposed that there is evidence indicating that the way language learners speak may have a structural organization, and that the contact situation should be defined not just by the source (SL) and target (TL) languages of the learner, but also by a learner system (AL). Studying these learner systems is essential for advancing contrastive analysis theory and applying it to language instruction. Nevertheless, these systems should be studied independently due to their impact on overall linguistic theory.

C. CONCLUSION

In summary, the seven factors mentioned indicate that the rough systems of language learners have more depth in linguistic, educational and social importance than previously thought. While rough systems used by language learners are worth studying on their own, the findings should also inform language teaching and linguistic theory.

Furthermore, understanding and evaluating various learning styles and techniques will assist in creating instructional methods that maximize the learner's preferred way of learning. Later, in the practical setting of the classroom, error analysis will remain a tool for teachers to evaluate learning and teaching, and decide on future priorities.

In short, considering the imprecise systems of language learners not as diseases to eliminate but as essential steps in acquiring the target system could lead to a better grasp of language and a kinder approach to teaching.

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