

GENERAL PERSPECTIVE OF AGE AND ACQUISITION IN STUDENTS' SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) TO ENHANCE IN LEARNING L2

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Abstract: Recently, the teacher can see that the manageable stockpile of research of just a few decades ago has been replaced by a coordinated, systematic store house of information. Researchers around the world are meeting, talking exchanging findings, comparing data and arriving at some mutually acceptable explanations. In language arts education, or example, teacher trainees are required to study first language acquisition, particularly acquisition after age five. in order to improve their understanding of the task of teaching language skills to native speakers. In foreign language education, most standard texts and curricula now include some introductory material in first language acquisition. The reasons for this are clear. The learners age five. in order to improve their understanding of the task of teaching language skills to native speakers. In foreign language education, most standard texts and curricula now include some introductory material in first language acquisition. The reasons for this are clear. First language acquisition starts in very early childhood, but second language acquisition can happen in childhood, early or late, as well as in adulthood. Do childhood and adulthood. and differences between them, hold some keys to language acquisition models and theories? The purpose of this article is to address some of those questions and to set forth explicitly some of the parameters for looking at the effects of age and aacquisition and also in their motivation.

Keyword: age, acquisition, students' SLA

Introduction

The question of the best age for learning a second language has aroused many people's curiosity and has practical concerns for parents bringing children up bilingually and for governments deciding the age to start teaching a second language to children. Undoubtedly there is a popular belief that young children are best at L2 learning, shared by many mainstream linguists: 'It is a common observation that a young child of immigrant parents may learn a second language in the streets, from other children, with amazing rapidity . . . while the subtleties that become second nature to the child may elude his parents despite high motivation and continued practice' (Chomsky, 1959, 49). But is there any empirical support for this 'common observation'?

It looks a simple matter: test some people who start young and some who start old and see who is better. However, like most academic questions, it turns out to be almost unanswerable in the form in which it is asked. The answer cannot for example be assumed to be the same for those acquiring the second language in natural circumstances and for those being taught in a classroom; though it may be that situations for natural L2 learning are fairly few in number, those for classroom learners vary according to the educational system and the language teaching methods involved. Even the word ‘age’ is problematic; L2 researchers often use it to refer to the age of arrival (AoA) in another country, thus confounding age with immigration, restricting the people studied to immigrants, usually to the USA – far from a random selection of L2 learners (Cook, 1986) – and leaving it uncertain how much L2 teaching or exposure the people had received before immigrating – one reason for going to a specific country may be a familiarity with the language spoken there. The research design is also highly problematic: a proper balancing of young and old would also involve them having the same amounts of L2 exposure (Munoz, 2008); ‘The crucial comparison is between the language proficiency of learners of two age groups who have learnt the second language for the same period of time; time has to be taken into account not only as the age at which learning started, but also as the duration of learning’ (Cook, 1986). Comparing children’s acquisition with that of adults is also fraught with problems, given the many non-language ways in which children are developing (Cook, 2010), for example memory capacity and Piagetian stage of development, and the many differences in their situations and language input.

The following article will provide information about theories of second language acquisition and teaching. There are numerous approaches and theories which have a huge impact on learning. Generally, approaches provide information about how people acquire their knowledge of the language and about the conditions which will promote successful language learning. At first, In this chapter the main focus will be on discuss the age and acquisition based on three points, they are teaching children. The second, there are three theories which will be briefly described in second language acquisition, they are: *The*

Creative Construction Theory, Communicative Language Teaching and the Cognitive Approach.

Discussion

1.1 Second Language Acquisition (SLA) In Different Age

1.1.1 Teaching Children

When language learning starts at a younger age, it is possible to help children develop positive feelings and attitudes towards other people and cultures having different languages. It creates opportunities to develop acceptance and understanding towards others. Thus, criticisms, incorrect judgments and feelings of superiority would be replaced by recognition and toleration of differences. The result of positive feelings would help children develop positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. From this perspective it can be argued that teaching FLs to young learners has affective components that help facilitating the language learning process. There are 5 categories may help give some practical approaches to teaching children

a. Intellectual Development

Here some rules of thumbs for the class room:

- a. Don't explain grammar using terms like present progressive or relative cause
- b. Rules stated in abstract term (to make a statement into a question, you add a "do" or "does") should be avoided
- c. Some grammatical concepts, especially at the upper lever childhood, can be called to learners' attention by showing them certain patterns (notice the "ing" at the end of the word)
- d. Certain more difficult concepts or patterns require more repetition than adult need. For example, repeating certain patterns (without boring) may be necessary to get the brain and the ear to cooperate.

b. Attention Span

One of the salient differences between adult and children is attention span.

- e. It is important to understand what attention span mean
- f. Put children in front of a TV showing a favorite cartoon and they will stay riveted for duration.

Here the reason makes the interesting activities:

- g. Because children are focused on the immediate now, activities should be designed to capture their immediate interest.
 - h. A lesson need variety of activities to keep interest and attention alive
 - i. A teacher needs to be animated, lively, and enthusiastic about the subject matter.
 - j. A sense of humor will go a long way to keep children laughing and learning. Since children's humor is quite different from adults' remember to put yourself in their shoes.
 - k. Children have a lot of natural curiosity. Make sure you tap into that curiosity whenever possible, and you will thereby help into maintain attention and focus.
- c. Sensory Input

Children need to have all five sense stimulated. Tour activities should strive to go well beyond the visual and the auditory modes that we are usually sufficient for a classroom.

- l. Pepper your lesson with physical activity, such as having students act out things (role-play), play games, or do total physical response activities.
- m. Project and other hands-on activities go a long way toward helping children to internalize language. Small group science the project, for example, are excellent ways to get them to learn words and structures and to practice meaningful language
- n. Sensory aids here and there help children to internalize concept. The smell of flowers, the touch of plants and fruits, the taste of food. Used the audio-visual aids like videos, pictures, tapes etc.

- o. Remember that your own nonverbal language is important because children will indeed attend very sensitively to your facial features, gesture, and touching.

d. Affective Factors

The children are often innovative in language from but still have a great many inhibitions. The children are extremely sensitive if they made mistakes. In affective factors there are some way to help the teacher in learning process, they are:

- p. Help the students to laugh with each other at various mistakes that they all make.
- q. Be patients and supportive to build self-esteem, yet the same time be firm in your expectations of students.
- r. Elicit as much oral participation as possible from students, especially the quieter ones, to give them plenty of opportunities for trying things out.

e. Authentic, Meaningful language

Children are focused on what this new language can actually be used for here and now. They are willing to put up with the language that doesn't hold immediate rewards for them. The classes can ill afford to have an overload of language that is neither authentic nor meaningful.

- s. Children are good at sensing language that is not authentic; therefore "canned" or stilted language will likely be rejected.
- t. Language needs to be firmly context embedded, story lines, familiar situations language. These will establish a context within which language can be received and sent thereby improve attention and retention.
- u. A whole language approach is essential. If language is broken into too many bits and pieces, students won't see the relationship to the whole.

1.1.2 Teaching Adult

The difference of children from adolescents and adults in EFL contexts is that they do not have a purpose for learning another language when they can perfectly communicate via their mother tongue. Therefore, they need to be given a reason for learning other languages. A reason for a child might be to enjoy in a classroom activity, relate the content with his/her experience, learning songs, learning about other people and places etc. There could be short term (finishing a puzzle, doing a problem solving activity, learning a song etc.) and long term (making a role-play at the end of the term for the parents, communicating with other children on the internet, understanding the instructions of the computer games etc.) reasons for learning. As they haven't developed abstract thinking, it is difficult for them to imagine how they will use the FL in the far future. For the differences that children have from adults the classroom activities and tasks should be designed according to the characteristics and the cognitive abilities of children.

So, as the teacher consider the five variables that apply to children, keep in mind some specific suggestions and caveats.

- v. Adults are more able to handle abstract rules and concepts. But be aware ! as you know, too much abstract generalization about usage and not enough real life language use can be deadly for adults, too.
- w. Adult have longer attention spans for material that may not be intrinsically interesting to them. But again, the rule of keeping your activities short and sweet applies also to adult age teaching.
- x. Sensory input need not always be quite as varied with adults, but one of the secret of lively adult classes is their appeal to multiple senses.
- y. Adult often bring a modicum of general self-confidence (global self esteem) into classroom, the fragility of egos may therefore not be quite as critical as those of children. Yet we should never underestimate the emotional factors that may be attendant to adult second language learning.

- z. Adult, with their more developed abstract thinking ability are better able to understand a context-reduced segment of language. Authenticity and meaningfulness are course still highly important, but in adult language teaching, a teacher can take temporary digressions to dissect and examine isolated linguistic properties, as long as student are returned to the original context.

Some implications for general classroom management can be drawn from what we know about differences between children and adult:

- aa. Do remember that even though adult cannot express complex thinking in the new language, they are nerveless intelligent adults with mature cognition and adult emotions. Show respect for the deeper thoughts and feelings that may be ‘trapped’ for moment by a low proficiency level.
- bb. Don’t treat adult in the class like children by calling them ‘kids’, using ‘caretaker’ talk (the way parents talk to children), and talking down to them
- cc. Do give the students as many opportunities as possible to make choice (cooperative learning about what they will do in and out of the classroom. That way, they can more effectively make an investment in their own learning process.
- dd. Don’t discipline adults in the same way as children. If discipline problems occur (disrespect, laughing, disrupting class, etc), first assume that the students are adult who can be reasoned with like adult.

1.1.3 Teaching Teen

The terrible teens are an age of transition, confusion, self-consciousness, growing and changing bodies and minds. This is very challenge for the teacher. Why? Teens are in between childhood and adulthood, and therefore a very special set of considerations applies to teaching them. Perhaps because of the enigma of teaching teenagers, little is specifically said in the language teaching field about teaching at this level. Nerveless,

some thoughts are worth verbalizing, even if in the form of simple remainders

- 1) Intellectual capacity adds abstract operational thought around age of twelve. Therefore, some sophisticated intellectual processing is increasingly possible. Complex problems can be solved with logical thinking. This means that linguistic metalanguage can now, theoretically, have some impact. But the success of any intellectual endeavor will be a factor of the attention a learner places on the task.
- 2) Attention spans are lengthening as a result of intellectual maturation, but once again, with many diversions present in a teenager's life, those potential attention spans can easily be shortened.
- 3) Varieties of sensory input are still important, but again, increasing capacities for abstraction lessen the essential nature of appealing to all five senses.
- 4) Factors surrounding ego, self-image and self-esteem are at their pinnacle. Teens are ultrasensitive to how others perceive their changing physical and emotional selves along with their mental capabilities. One of the most important concerns of the secondary school teacher is to keep self esteem high by:
 - 1) Avoiding embarrassment of students at all costs.
 - 2) Affirming each person's talents and strengths.
 - 3) Allowing mistakes and other errors to be accepted
 - 4) Deemphasizing competition between classmates,
 - 5) Encouraging small-group work where risks can be taken more easily by teen
- 5) Secondary school students are of course becoming increasingly adult like in their ability to make those occasional diversions from the 'here and now' nature of immediate communicative contexts to dwell on a grammar point or vocabulary item. But as in teaching adults, care must be taken not to insult them with stilted language or to bore them with over analysis

1.2 Second Language Acquisition (SLA) In Theories

1.2.1 Creative Construction Theory or the Naturalistic Approach

The term nativist “is derived from the fundamental assertion that language acquisition is innately determined, that we are born with a built-in device of some kind that predisposes us to language acquisition.” (Brown 1973). In 1965, Noam Chomsky, a linguist, proposed the theory that all people have an innate, biological ability to acquire a language.

Both of the theorized that people possess a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a sort of neurological wiring that, regardless of the language to be acquired, allows a child to listen to a language, decipher the rules of that language, and begin creating with the language at a very young age. Chomsky suggests that, if provided with the correct input, the LAD predisposes all people to the acquisition of a second language in basically the same manner. Most of us cannot remember learning our first language – it just seemed to happen automatically. However, for many children learning a second language, the process does not seem natural or automatic, and it can be associated with many negative experiences and memories. Here is the Chomsky’s concept of a LAD. The Monitor Theory is composed of four hypotheses that provide a framework for teaching a second language

a. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis

This hypothesis by Stephen Krashen is one of the most controversial theoretical perspectives in Second Language Acquisition. It is based on a set of five interrelated hypotheses that are listed below:

1) *The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*

As mentioned above, Krashen claims that there is a difference between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is ‘a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language, not unlike the process used by a child to ‘pick up’ a language’. Learning is a conscious process in which ‘learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process’ (Brown 2002: 278).

2) *The Monitor Hypothesis*

The monitor has nothing to do with acquisition but with learning. The learned system acts only as an editor or ‘monitor’, making minor changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced. According to Krashen, three conditions are necessary for monitor use: 1. sufficient time, 2. focus on form, 3. knowing the rules.

3) *The Natural Order Hypothesis*

This hypothesis states that we acquire the rules of a language in a certain order that is predictable. However, this does not mean that every acquirer will acquire grammatical structures in exactly the same order. It states rather that, in general, certain structures tend to be acquired early and others to be acquired late. (Krashen, Terrell : 1983)

4) *The Input Hypothesis*

This hypothesis states that it is important for the acquirer to understand language that is a bit beyond his or her current level of competence. This means, if a learner is on a level i the input he gets should be $i + 1$. This means that the language that learners are exposed to should be just far enough beyond their current competence that they can understand most of it but still is challenged to make progress (Brown 2002: 278).

5) *The Affective Filter Hypothesis*

This hypothesis states that it is easier for a learner to acquire a language when he/she is not tense, angry, anxious, or bored. According to Dulay and Burt, performers with optimal attitudes have a lower affective filter. A low filter means that the performer is more open to the input language. (Krashen, Terrell 1983: 38) Krashen’s assumptions have been hotly disputed. Many psychologists like McLaughlin have criticised Krashen’s unclear distinction between subconscious (acquisition) and conscious (learning) processes. According to Brown, second language learning is a process in which varying degrees of learning and of acquisition can both be beneficial, depending upon the learner’s own styles and strategies. Furthermore, the $i + 1$ formula that is presented by Krashen raises the question how i and 1 should be defined. Moreover, what about the ‘silent period’? Krashen states that after a certain time, the silent period, speech will ‘emerge’ to the learner, which means that

the learner will start to speak as a result of comprehensible input. Nevertheless, there is no information about what will happen to the learners, for whom speech will not ‘emerge’ and ‘for whom the silent period might last forever’ (Brown 2002: 281).

1.2.2 Communicative Language Teaching

The communicative approach has its origins in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s and more generally in the developments of both Europe and North America. This approach varies from traditional approaches because it is learner centred. Also, linguists state that there is a need to focus on communicative proficiency in language teaching and that Communicative Language Teaching can fulfil this need.

There are numerous reasons for the rapid expansion of Communicative Language Teaching:

- The work of the Council of Europe in the field of communicative syllabus design;
- The theoretical ideas of the communicative approach found rapid application by textbook writers;
- There was an overwhelming acceptance of these new ideas by British language teaching specialists and curriculum development centres.

Proponents of this approach state that the goal of language teaching is communicative competence. Another aim is the development of procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening).

a. Theory of language

Central aspect in Communicative Language Teaching is communicative competence. Hymes defines competence as what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. This includes both knowledge and ability for language use. In his book *Teaching Language as Communication* (1978) (quoted in Richards, Rodgers 1986: 71). He presented a view of the relationship between linguistic

systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. There are four dimensions of communicative competence that are defined as:

1. Grammatical competence,
2. Sociolinguistic competence,
3. Discourse competence, and
4. Strategic competence

b. Theory of learning

Although there is little discussion of learning theory, there are still some elements that, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986), can be defined as communication principles, task principles and meaningfulness principles. The first one includes activities that involve real communication which are supposed to promote learning. The second element describes activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks which are also supposed to promote learning. The last one states that language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. Of great importance is meaningful and authentic language use.

1.2.3 The Cognitive Approach

Cognitive psychologists claim that one of the main features of second language acquisition is the building up of a knowledge system that can eventually be called on automatically for speaking and understanding. At first, learners have to build up a general knowledge of the language they want to understand and produce. After a lot of practice and experience they will be able to use certain parts of their knowledge very quickly and without realising that they did so. Gradually, this use becomes automatic and the learners may focus on other parts of the language. The cognitive theory is a relative newcomer to second language acquisition and there have been only a few empirical studies about this approach so far. Although we know that the processes of automatizing and restructuring are central to the approach, it is still not clear what kinds of structures will be automatized through practice and what will be restructured. They may also be based on the acquisition of

new knowledge which somehow ‘fits’ into an existing system and may, in fact, ‘restructure’ this system (cf. Lightbown, Spada 1995: 25).

a. McLaughlin’s Attention-Processing Model

This model connects processing mechanisms with categories of attention to formal properties of language. Consequently there are four cells.

- The first one refers to ‘focal automatic processes’ like the student’s performance in a test situation or a violin player performing in a concert.
- The second one characterises ‘focal controlled processes’ such as the learner’s performance based on formal rule learning.
- The next cell refers to ‘peripheral controlled processes’ such as the phenomenon of learning skills without any instruction.
- The last cell focuses on ‘peripheral automatic processes’ and can be related to a learner’s performance in situations of communication.

‘Controlled processes are “capacity limited and temporary”, and automatic processes are “relatively permanent”’ (McLaughlin et al. 1983: 142 in Brown 2002). Automatic processes mean processing in a more accomplished skill which means that the brain is able to deal with numerous bits of information simultaneously. According to Brown, ‘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 reorganised into new units, thereby allowing the ...old components to be replaced by a more efficient procedure’ (McLaughlin 1990b: 188 in Brown 2002).

b. Implicit and Explicit Models

According to Brown and other linguists, there is a distinction between implicit and explicit linguistic knowledge. Explicit knowledge means ‘that a person knows about language and the ability to articulate those facts in some way’ (Brown 2002: 285). Implicit knowledge is ‘information that is automatically and spontaneously used in language tasks. [...] Implicit processes enable a learner to perform language but not necessarily to cite rules governing the performance.’ (Brown 2002: 285) Instead of implicit and explicit Bialostok uses the terms ‘unanalysed’ an ‘analysed’ knowledge.

Unanalysed knowledge is described as ‘the general form in which we know most things without being aware of the structure of that knowledge; on the other hand, learners are overtly aware of the structure of analyzed knowledge’ (Brown 2002: 286). Furthermore, these models also distinguish between automatic and non-automatic processing which is build on McLaughlin’s conception of automaticity. Brown states that ‘automaticity refers to the learner’s relative access to the knowledge. Knowledge that can be retrieved easily and quickly is automatic. Knowledge that takes time and effort to retrieve is non-automatic’ (Brown 2002: 286). Another significant fact in second language performance is ‘time’. It takes learners a different amount of time until they produce language orally.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to address such questions by outlining two popular second language acquisition theories: Nativist Theory, and Environmentalist Theory. We have argued that nativist theory provides an answer to the question of how people acquire a second language, but that it falls short in addressing the importance of the environmental factors encountered by the second language learner. Environmentalist theory highlights the social and psychological factors as well as the linguistic factors in second language acquisition. This brief paper is meant to introduce the reader to both of these theories as well as to some of the principal researchers within each camp.

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