

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



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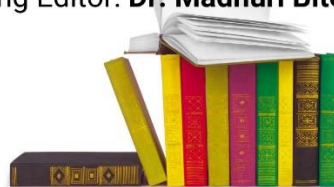
AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025

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Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

ISSN 2278-9529

Theories of Acquisition of English as a Second Language

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14980078>

Article History: Submitted-19/12/2024, Revised-03/01/2025, Accepted-25/01/2025, Published-28/02/2025.

Abstract:

English is acquired as second language by Indian students. The process of learning English as a second language is essentially differently from that of the acquisition of first language. A lot of research has gone to understand the methods that can prove effective for the acquisition of English as second language. The present research article critically looks at various theories put forth by the scholars that explain at length the process of acquisition of English as second language. Depending upon level of learning for instance, primary level, secondary level or university level, different theories can prove effective. Some of the important theories discussed in this article include The Acculturation Model, Accommodation Theory and so on.

Keywords: Accommodation, Acquisition Process, English as second language, Technical Education, The Acculturation Model.

INTRODUCTION

General Theories on Second Language Acquisition. According to Ellis (1985), second language acquisition is a complex process, involving many interrelated factors. The term ‘Second language acquisition’ (SLA) refers to the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural setting. It covers the development of phonology, lexis, grammar, and pragmatic knowledge, but has been largely confined to morph syntax. According to research in this field, it is thought that acquisition can take place only when people understand messages in the target language, focusing on what rather than how it is said. There are affective prerequisites to acquisition such as a positive orientation to speakers of the language, and at least some degree of self-confidence, as well as a silent period before any real spoken fluency develops. The amount of skills and knowledge, called competence, will be acquired through input, and certainly the initial production will not be very accurate. The study of SLA is directed at accounting for the learner’s competence but in order to do so has set out to investigate empirically how a learner performs when he or she uses a second language.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Ingrid Fandrych has conducted a study to find out whether the modern word processor helps the student to overcome difficulties of spelling and grammar. Modern word processors do not only include spell checks and dictionaries but also grammar checks. Do these facilities help second language students to compose correct sentences and texts? Will they even make the grammar component that has traditionally been part of Academic Writing courses redundant? This paper sets out to determine the usefulness of modern word processors in terms of their grammar and spelling assistance and discuss the consequences for second language learning and teaching. For this purpose, the most common word processors on the

market at present (Word, WordPerfect) will be tested on a variety of texts ranging from students' essays to newspaper articles and literary and academic texts. It becomes clear from the above analyses that word processors cannot yet solve all the problems many users face when composing texts, especially if English is not their first language. It would certainly be premature to reduce the grammar component of Academic Writing courses and to rely instead on the grammar and spell checks of modern software.

2. Mark D. Offner has carried out any interesting study to find out whether standard English can be developed for native and non-native speakers. Throughout the years there has been much controversy concerning the question of whether a standard English actually does exist and, if so, how should it be defined? A study of the wide variety of materials published on this issue reveals that the opinions and conclusions are as varied and far-reaching as the topic itself. From this it could be concluded that a standard English does not exist simply because no consensus can be reached on this subject and because, in reality, there are a wide variety of English dialects presently in use. It might be asked whether it would be beneficial or even desirable to label and define some form as standard and attempt to spread this "superior" form to all non-native (as well as native) speakers as the only officially accepted form of English. In dealing with these questions this paper suggests that any attempt to define a standard English is essentially futile and that the form English will take is naturally determined by usage and communicability - factors which are beyond control.

3. Kristen Gatehouse ⁽⁹⁾ conducted a study on key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development. Based on insights gained from developing the curriculum for Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences and a review of the literature on ESP, this paper is intended to offer theoretical support for ESL instructors developing ESP curricula for ESL contexts.

4. Norris and Ortega in Effectiveness of L2 Instruction: A Research Synthesis and Quantitative Meta- Analysis have found that instruction definitely has a positive effect. Instructional treatments involving an explicit focus on the rule- governed nature of L2 structure is more effective than treatments that do not include such a focus. The effects are also durable. In other words, what the students have learned explicitly is remembered overtime.

5. Swain in her article, focus on form through Conscious Reflection, showed that learners can be made to notice the imperfections or ‘holes’ by use of explicit rule presentation, followed by activities that require that the learners use output. During the process of output, the learners in effect reflect on their own inadequacies, or notice the holes and they consult their explicit to implicit knowledge to fill in those holes.

6. Foster and Skehan (1996) in Studies in Second Language Acquisition also stress the importance of planned output tasks. In tasks for which planning time is permitted, learners increase their accuracy and complexity.

AIM

This study aims at discussing some important theories of acquisition of English as a second language.

Six theories of Second Language Acquisition.

The Acculturation Model-The term “acculturation” is defined as ‘the process of becoming adapted to a new culture’ (Ellis1985). This is an important aspect of Second Language Acquisition since language is one of the most observable expressions of culture and because in second language settings, the acquisition of a new language is seen as tied to the way in which the learner’s community and the target language community view each other. A central

premise on this model is that a learner will control the degree to which he acquires the second language.

Accommodation Theory- This theory derives from the research of Giles and focuses on the uses of language in multilingual communities like Britain. It operates within a socio-psychological framework and its primary concern is to investigate how an intergroup use of language reflects basic social and psychological attitudes in inter-ethnic communication.

Discourse Theory -This theory is proposed by Halliday (1975) and his view of first language acquisition. It derives from Hymes's description of communicative competence in which communication is treated as the matrix of linguistic knowledge. Hence, language development should be considered in terms of how the learner discovers the meaning potential of language by participating in communication. Halliday shows in a study how his own child acquired language and puts forward that the development of the formal linguistic devices for basic language grows out of the interpersonal uses to which language is put. One of its main principles is that there is a 'natural' route in syntactical development.

The Monitor Model -Krashen's Monitor Model is one of the most prominent and comprehensive of existing theories in second language acquisition. It is an account on language-learner variability within the framework of the Monitor Model. It consists of five central hypotheses, and related to them, a number of factors which influence second language acquisition. The five hypotheses are first, the acquisition-learning hypothesis where the terms 'acquired' and 'learnt' are defined as subconscious and conscious study of language; secondly, the natural hypothesis which affirms that grammatical structures are 'acquired' in a predictable order; thirdly the monitor hypothesis, where the monitor is the device that learners use to edit their language performance; fourth, the input hypothesis by which 'acquisition' takes place as a result of the learner having understood input a little beyond the

current level of his competence; and finally, the affective filter hypothesis, where the filter controls how much input the learner comes into contact with, and how much is converted into intake.

The Variable Competence Model- This model is proposed by Ellis (1984) and extends on the work of Tirone and Bialystok. It claims that the way a language is learnt is a reflection of the way it is used. Therefore, two distinctions form the basis for this model; one refers to the process of language use, and the other to the product. The product of language use deals with unplanned and planned discourse. Unplanned discourse is related to the lack of preparation or forethought, and also to spontaneous communication. On the other hand, planned discourse requires conscious thought and gives priority to expression rather than thought. The process of language use is to be understood in terms of rules and procedures, that is, linguistic knowledge and the ability to make use of this knowledge. (Ellis 1985)

The Universal Hypothesis - In the words of Ellis (1985), this hypothesis states that second language acquisition is determined by certain linguistic universals. Those working on this tradition argue that there is a Universal Grammar that constrains the kind of hypotheses that the learner can form and that it is innate. The relationship between Universal Grammar and acquisition of the first language is, in fact, a necessary one, as Chomsky's primary justification for Universal Grammar is that it provides the only way of accounting for how children are able to learn their mother tongue.

The Natural Approach and Language Acquisition- In 1977, a teacher of Spanish, Tracy Terrell, and an applied linguist, Stephen Krashen, both from California, developed a language teaching proposal that incorporated the statements of the principles and practices of second language acquisition. In their book, *The Natural Approach* (1983), we find theoretical sections prepared by Krashen and sections on classroom procedures, prepared by Terrell.

Their method focuses on teaching communicative abilities and the primacy of meaning, following a communicative approach, since they see communication as the primary function of language, they rejected earlier methods of language teaching which viewed grammar as the central component. Krashen and Terrell's view of language consists of lexical items, structures, and messages. This method has been identified with "traditional" approaches based on the use of language in communicative situations without recourse to the native language. The term "natural" refers to the principles of language learning in young children in the Natural Method, and similarly in Krashen and Terrell's principles found in successful second language acquisition. However, the fact that the Natural Approach was related to the older Natural Method does not mean that they are synonymous terms. In fact, the Natural Method became known as the Direct Method by the turn of the twentieth century. Although they share the same tradition and the same term "natural", there are important differences between them. Thus, the Direct Method places emphasis on teacher monologues, direct repetition, and formal questions and answers, focusing on accurate production of target language sentences. In the Natural Approach there is an emphasis on exposure, or input, rather than practice, that is, what the language learners hear before they try to produce language. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the central role of comprehension (Richards & Rodgers (1992). The theory of the Natural Approach is grounded in Krashen's views of language acquisition, which is based on scientific studies (Krashen and Terrell 1983). Therefore, it is relevant to present first, the four principles on which this theory is based on, and then, the five hypotheses that account for this method. The first principle is that comprehension precedes production. The second general principle accounts for production to emerge in stages, where students are not forced to speak before they are ready. The third general principle is that the course syllabus consists of communicative goals, organizing classroom activities by topics, not grammatical structures. The final principle is that activities

must foster a lowering of the affective filter of the students, encouraging them to express their ideas, opinions, emotions and feeling. A good atmosphere must be created by the instructor.

The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis- The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis claims that there are two independent systems of second language performance: the acquired system and the learned system. Acquisition refers to a natural and subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language in order to develop a language proficiency. Speakers are, then, concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act through a meaningful interaction in the target language or natural communication. According to Krashen (1983), learning refers to a process of conscious rules for meaningful communication which results in conscious knowledge about the language. According to Krashen, 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition'.

The Monitor Hypothesis- The Monitor Hypothesis emphasizes the role of grammar, as the learned knowledge to correct ourselves when we communicate, but through conscious learning, in both first and in second languages. This may happen before we actually speak or write. However, the Monitor use itself is limited to three specific requirements. Thus, the performer first, has to have enough time to think about rules; secondly, the learner has to focus on form, on what rather than how; and finally, the learner has to know the rule. According to Krashen (1983), the role of the monitor should be used only to correct deviations from speech and to polish its appearance. Hence, it appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. According to Krashen, the role of the monitor is - or should be - minor, being used only to correct deviations from 'normal' speech and to give speech a more 'polished' appearance. Krashen,

then, establishes an individual variation analysis among language learners regarding their monitor use.

The Natural Order Hypothesis- According to the Natural Order Hypothesis, the acquisition of grammatical structures take place in a predictable order in which errors are signs of naturalistic developmental processes. This order seems to be independent of the learners' age, first language background, conditions of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not statistically similar. All these features reinforced the existence of a natural order of language acquisition. In general, certain structures tend to be acquired early such as grammatical morphemes, or "function words" and others to be acquired late such as the third person singular morpheme or the possessive marker. However, Krashen (1983) points out that this hypothesis is not a language program syllabus, and in fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

The Input Hypothesis. - The Input Hypothesis is Krashen's explanation of how second language acquisition takes place, and is only concerned with acquisition, not learning. This hypothesis points out the relationship between the learner's input and the language acquisition process, where the speaking fluency emerges after the acquirer has built up competence through comprehending input. This hypothesis claims that listening comprehension and reading are of primary importance in a language program, and that speaking fluently in a second language comes on its own with time. According to this hypothesis, learners improve and progress along the natural order when receiving second language input. Since not all of the learners can be at the same level of linguistic competence at the same time, Krashen (1983) suggests that natural communicative input is the key to design a syllabus, ensuring in this way that each learner will receive the appropriate input for their current stage of linguistic competence.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis- In the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1983) gives a framework to the learner's emotional state or attitudes that may pass, impede, or block the necessary input to acquisition. These affective variables are usually related to success in second language acquisition and they contribute to the concept of "low affective filter". Among the positive variables, we may include motivation, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety. It means that the performer is open to input, and that having the right attitudes, such as confidence and encouragement, second language acquisition will be a complete success. On the contrary, low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to raise the affective filter and form a mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being use for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is up, it impedes language acquisition.

Factors which influence second language acquisition- 'The five-hypothesis seen mentioned above form the core of the second language acquisition theory that underlies Natural Approach. We will consider now the implication of the theory to several issues such as second language "aptitude", the role of the first language, the role of routines and patterns, individual variation, and age differences in second language rate and attainment (Krashen & Terrell 1983).

Second Language Aptitude-Supported by empirical studies, the idea of second language aptitude is related to rapid progress in second language classes, and for those students that have this aptitude, a better performance in foreign language classes. The speed of learning is measured by grammar-type tests that involve a conscious awareness of language, where the ability to consciously "figure out" grammar rules will lead students to success. Aptitude differences play a large role if grammatical accuracy is emphasized.

The Role of the First Language-*The role of the first language in second language performance is closely related to the term interference, which can recast as a learner 'strategy' (Corder 1981).* This concept implies that second language acquisition (SLA) is strongly influenced by the learner's first language (L1) when we try to speak a second language (L2). It was claimed that there is a "fall back" on first language grammatical competence when students have to produce in second language. It should not be thought, according to Krashen (1983) that any approach will completely eliminate this mode of production. When students try to express themselves in the target language beyond their acquired ability, they will tend to fall back on the L1. During the last decades, there has been considerable disagreement among researchers about the extent of the role of L1 due to behaviourist which see SLA as a process of habit-formation. Hence, according to this theory, errors were the result of interference from the habits of the L1. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was an attempt to predict the areas of difficulty that learners experienced, and eliminate the chance of error but it did not prove to be successful. As the learner's proficiency grows, L1 influence will become less powerful.

Routines and Patterns- Routines and patterns are sentences spoken by performers who have not acquired or learned the rules involved, thus 'What's your name?' They may be helpful for encouraging input in the real world, as well as to manage conversations. Patterns are partially memorized and may be of considerable indirect benefit. Correctly used, routines and patterns can help acquirers gain more input and manage conversations, and on the contrary, they can lead to trouble if not used effectively as they cannot be used for every situation.

Individual Variation. -The theory of second language acquisition possesses a basic uniformity in the way we all acquire language. It also predicts that acquirers will vary only in certain ways, thus in the rate and extent of acquisition. This is due to two factors: the amount of comprehensible input an acquirer obtains, and the strength of the affective filter. We can

also observe variation with respect to routines and patterns use with respect to classroom activities. Students who have no aptitude for grammar or who simply are not interested in grammar, will concentrate almost completely on acquisition activities.

Age Differences: Age is the variable that has been most discussed when dealing with second language acquisition because of the belief that children are better language learners than adults. There has been considerable research on the effect of age on this field. The available evidence suggests that age does not alter the route of acquisition, and according to Ellis (1985), child, adolescent, and adult learners go through the same stages irrespective of how old they are. However, rate and success of SLA appear to be strongly influenced by the age of the learner. Where rate is concerned, it is the older learners who reach higher levels of proficiency. Literature research shows that although age improves language learning capacity, performance may peak in the teens, and that age was a factor only when it came to morphology and syntax. Where success of SLA is concerned, the general finding is that the longer the exposure to the L2, the more native-like L2 proficiency becomes.

The Concept of Interlanguage -In this section we will relate the concept of interlanguage to its background in cognitive views on language acquisition and the sequence of development in second language acquisition. Closely related to interlanguage is the nature of errors. The term interlanguage was first coined by Selinker (1972) and refers to the systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent of both the learner's first language and the target language. The term is related to a theory of learning that stresses the learner-internal factors which contribute to language acquisition, and it was the first attempt to examine empirically how a learner builds up knowledge of a language. Interlanguage was a construct which identifies the stages of development through which L2 learners pass on their way to proficiency. The question was to what extent the order of development paralleled that in L1 acquisition. Cognitive accounts of first language acquisition (FLA) stressed the

active contribution of the child and minimized the importance of behaviourist concepts, such as interference, imitation and reinforcement. One of the most prominent figures in this field, Noam Chomsky, claimed that the child's knowledge of his mother tongue was derived from a Universal Grammar which consisted of a set of innate linguistic principles to control sentences formation. Another cognitive feature that needs mentioning is that the child builds up his knowledge of his mother tongue by means of hypothesis-testing. Corder (1981) suggests that both L1 and L2 learners make errors in order to test out certain hypotheses about the nature of the language they are learning. He saw the making of errors as a strategy. This view was in opposition to the view of the SLA presented in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis where L2 errors are the result of differences between the learner's first language and the target language.

CONCLUSION

Though the process of language acquisitions defines all the attempts to understand it in a clear manner, scholars hold the opinion that different theoretical approaches are required to teach English to the students who learn it as a second language. The above theories have critically discussed various roots through which the non native learners acquire English as a second language. The knowledge of these theories would surely prove to be of immense value to the teachers of English as a second language. It is to be noted that everything cannot be explained with a reference to theories, much depends on the innovative methods adopted by the teachers and interest and zeal of the learners when it comes to the question of acquisition of language.

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