

Lecture Two

2. Theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

2.1. Role of theory in SLA research

Again, the main goal of a theory of SLA is description (the characterisation of the nature of the linguistic categories which constitute the LL's IL at any point in development).

But other scholars are interested in more than just the description. They have tried to discover why the learner develops the particular linguistic categories that he does (they wish to know *what* is acquired, *how* is it acquired and *when* it is acquired, and *why* it is acquired in this way).

Thus, theory building is concerned with explanation as well as with *description*.

Firstly, 'explanation' can mean 'the way in which the learner works on samples of the input data, converting them into intake and then using his knowledge to produce output (i.e., it includes the acquisition sequence and order and the processes responsible for it).

Secondly, it also refers to what motivates the learner to learn and what causes him to cease learning (fossilize).

Shumann (1976) distinguishes these two types of explanation, which he refers respectively as 'cognitive processes' responsible for how SLA takes place and 'initiating factors' responsible for why SLA takes place.

Ellis (1984) refers to the two types as 'assembly mechanisms' and 'power mechanisms'.

How do researchers set about building an explanation of how and why SLA takes place?

Long (1983) distinguishes two approaches to theory building: the 'theory-then-research' approach and the 'research-then-theory' approach.

Stages of the 'theory-then-research' approach:

1. Develop an explicit theory.
2. Derive a testable prediction from the theory.
3. Conduct research to test the prediction.
4. Modify (or abandon) the theory if the prediction is disconfirmed.
5. Test a new prediction if the first prediction is confirmed.

Stages of the 'research-then-theory' approach:

1. Select a phenomenon for investigation.
2. Measure its characteristics.
3. Collect data and look for systematic patterns.
4. Formalize significant patterns as rules describing natural events.

2.2. Seven theories of SLA

1.The Acculturation Model

Acculturation is defined as the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. It is an important aspect of SLA, because lge is one of the most observable expressions of culture (the acquisition of a new lge is seen as tied to the way in which the ll's community and the TL community view each other.

SLA is just one aspect of 'acculturation' and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the TL group will control the degree to which he acquires the second lge.

Acculturation, and hence SLA, is determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the TL culture.

The social variables (they govern whether the overall learning situation is 'good' or 'bad').

Psychological factors as lge shock, culture shock, motivation and ego boundaries.

The Nativization Model

SLA is seen as the result of two general forces : nativization and denativization.

Nativization consists of assimilation ; the learner makes the input conform to his own internalized view of what constitutes the L2 system. The learner simplifies the learning task by building hypotheses based on the knowledge he already possesses (knowledge of the first lge, knowledge of the world).

Denativization involves accomodation. The learner adjusts his internalized system to make it fit the input. The learner makes use of inferencing strategies which enable him to remodel his IL system in accordance with the 'external norm'.

2.Accomodation Theory

It shares certain premises with the previous theory.

Both seek to answer the relationships that hold between the learner's social group (the ingroup) and the TL community (the outgroup).

How the ingroup defines itself in relation to the outgroup is important for SLA.

Motivation is the primary determinant of L2 proficiency.

3.Discourse Theory

It follows from a theory of lge use, in which communication is treated as the matrix of linguistic knowledge.

Lge development should be considered in terms of how the learner discovers the meaning potential of lge by participating in communication.

The theory's main principles:

- A. SLA follows a 'natural' route in syntactical development.
- B. Native speakers adjust their speech in order to negotiate meaning with non-native speakers.
- C. The conversational strategies used to negotiate meaning, and the resulting adjusted input, influence the rate and route of SLA in a number of ways :
 - 1. Grammar is learned in the same order as the frequency order of the various features in the input.
 - 2. Acquisition of commonly occurring formulas and then analyses of their component parts.
 - 3. Vertical construction of sentences (vertical structures are the precursors of horizontal structures).
- D. Thus, the 'natural' route is the result of learning how to hold conversations.

4.The Monitor Model

Krashen's Monitor Model has enjoyed considerable prominence in SLA research. It consists of five central hypotheses (the acquisition/ learning H; the natural order H; the monitor H; the input H; the affective filter H).

Causative variables taken into account in the Monitor Model

- 1. Aptitude: for Krashen, it relates to learning and 'attitude' is related to acquisition.
- 2. Role of the L1: He rejects the view that the L1 interferes with SLA (L1 is seen as a performance strategy)
- 3. Routines and patterns: He rejects the view that formulaic speech contributes to acquisition.
- 4. Individual differences: He claims that SLA follows a natural route. Thus there is no individual variation in the acquisition process itself.
- 5. Age: it influences SLA in a number of ways. It affects the amount of comprehensible input that is obtained. Age affects learning; older LLs are better suited to study lge form and to use lge knowledge.

5. The Variable Competence Model

- It was proposed by Ellis (1984).
- It is based on two distinctions:
 1. the process of lge use.
 2. the product.
- it is based on a framework of lge use (it claims that the way a lge is learnt is a reflection of the way it is used).
- the product includes a continuum of discourse types from unplanned to planned.
 1. unplanned discourse is discourse that lacks forethought and preparation (e.g., spontaneous communication as everyday conversation; brainstorming in writing).
 2. planned discourse is discourse that is thought out prior to expression (it requires conscious thought and the opportunity to work out content and expression as in a prepared lecture and careful writing).
- the process of lge use is to be understood in terms of the distinction between:
 1. linguistic knowledge (rules) (competence).
 2. the ability to make use of this knowledge (procedures) (capacity).
- thus, the product (types of discourse) is the result of either or both of the following:
 1. a variable competence : possession of a heterogeneous rule system.
 2. variable application of procedures for actualizing knowledge in discourse.
- the variability of the learner's rule system is described with reference to Bialystock's (1982) dual distinction between:
 1. automatic vs. non-automatic
 - a. automatic: knowledge that can be retrieved easily and quickly.
 - b. non-automatic: knowledge that takes time and effort to retrieve.
 2. analytic vs. unanalytic
- procedures for actualizing knowledge are of two types : primary and secondary processes.
- each set of processes has an external and internal representation referred to as discourse and cognitive processes respectively.

1. primary processes are responsible for engaging in unplanned discourse (unanalyzed and automatic knowledge).

2. secondary processes: in planned discourse (analyzed knowledge).

- both processes account for how L2 LLs actualize their linguistic knowledge in discourse.

- they account for the variability of lge learner lge.

- through using procedures, the lge learner utilizes the existing knowledge and creates new linguistic rules.

- they account for acquisition.

- lge acquisition is the result of our capacity to make sense (syntactic processing/output).

6. The Universal Hypothesis

- it provides an interesting account of how the linguistic properties of the TL and the learner's L1 may influence the course of development.

- one of its advantages is that it brings SLA studies into line with current linguistic knowledge that follows the Chomskyan tradition.

- it avoids the complex explanations based on learner strategies.

- the value of this hypothesis for SLA theory is two-fold:

1. it focuses attention on the nature of the TL itself (the linguistic devices used in a given lge).

2. it provides subtle reconsideration of 'transfer' as an important factor in SLA.

7. A Neurofunctional Theory

- the previous models explain SLA in linguistic and psycholinguistic terms.

- this is based on a neurolinguistic research (thus, it gives a different type of explanation).

- THE SCOPE:

‘... to characterize the neurolinguistic information processing systems responsible for the development and use of lge’ (Lamendella, 1979).

- BASIC PREMISE: of a neurofunctional view of SLA is that there is a connection between lge function and neural anatomy.
- Hatch (1983) claims that, 'there is no single 'black box' for lge in the brain'.i.e., it is not possible to identify precisely which areas of the brain are associated with lge functioning.
- Neurofunctional accounts of SLA have considered the contribution of two areas of the brain:
 1. The right hemisphere
 2. The areas of the left hemisphere (Wernicke's and Broca's areas).
- These neurofunctional accounts have tended to focus on specific aspects of SLA.
 1. Age
 2. Formulaic speech
 3. Fossilization
 4. Pattern practice in CR SLA.

Lamendella's Neurofunctional Theory

The researcher distinguished two basic types of lge acquisition:

1. Primary lge acquisition (it is found in the child's acquisition of one or more lge from 2 to 5 years old.
2. Secondary LA (it is subdivided into a foreign lge learning – formal CR learning- and second lge acquisition – natural acquisition of a lge after the age of 5).

Towards a composite picture

What aspects of SLA must a theory of SLA cover in order to provide a composite picture ?

First, we have to return to the framewok for investigating SLA to summarize the first six theories (the neurofunctional perspective is excluded, as it constitutes a different kind of account of SLA).

The Framework for Investigating SLA reconsidered

A number of components of SLA are to be considered:

1. Situational factors
2. The linguistic input
3. Learner differences
4. Learner processes
5. Linguistic output

What is the interrelationship between these components?

Situational factors influence input (in a CR setting) and also the use of learner processes (as the use of CSs).

Learner differences, as motivation and personality, help determine the quantity and quality of the input and also affect the operation of learner strategies (as the use of metalingual strategies).

Input comprises: (1) the inherent properties of the TL system, and (2) the formally and interactionally adjusted features found in foreigner and teacher talk.

Input constitutes the data upon which the learner strategies work, and also it is determined by the learner's use of communication strategies (CSs).

Thus, the relationship between input and learner processes is an interactive one.

The learner's strategies (learning strategies, production strategies and CSs) produce a variable L2 output.

This in turn is part of the input (Reminder: auto-input).

Thus the framework is cyclical.

In brief, the six theories of SLA do not fulfil the main premises of the framework, although taken together they do so.

The basis issues which a theory of SLA will need to consider

They will be presented in the form of hypotheses.

2.4. Eleven Hypotheses about SLA

General

H1: SLA follows a natural sequence of development : Minor variations in the order of development and and major variations in the rate of development and in the level of proficiency achieved.

Explanation:

The sequence: refers to the general stages of development which characterize SLA.

The order: referred to the development of specific grammatical features.

Variations in the rate and success of SLA: differences in age, learning style, aptitude, motivation, and personality result in differences in the **route** along

which LLs pass in SLA. And these factors influence the rate and success of SLA.

H2: at any one stage of development, the learner's IL comprises a system of variable rules.

Whereas H1 refers to vertical variability, H2 acknowledges horizontal variability. The two variabilities are related: the horizontal variability is the mirror of vertical variability.

N.B.

Each IL system contains linguistic forms that are in free variation, i.e., forms that are not guided by rules and whose use is not systematic at all (a number of competing rules).

Situation

H3 : situational factors are indirect determinants of the rate of SLA and also of the level of proficiency achieved, but they do not influence the sequence of development, and affect the order of development only in minor and temporary ways.

It claims that CR and naturalistic SLA will follow the same developmental route. It also follows that differences in specific settings (in terms of the level of formality) will not influence the developmental route. This would appear to contradict the important role played by situational factors in language-learner variability.

Hypothesis 4 : Situational factors are the primary causes of variability in language-learner language. Situational factors (who is addressing whom, when, about what, and where) govern the learner's variable use of his IL in the same way as they govern the native speaker's use of his L1.

Input

H5: input that is interactionally (but not necessarily formally) adjusted as a result of the negotiation of meaning in two-way discourse between the learner and another speaker functions (but not the sole determinant) of the sequence/order and rate of development. H5 draws on the Discourse Theory in allocating a constitutive role for adjusted input in SLA (though it acknowledges that adjusted input alone does not explain SLA).

Learner Differences

H6: affective learner differences (those related to motivation and personality) determine the rate of SLA and the level of proficiency achieved, but not the sequence or order of development.

H7: the learner's L1 influences the order of development (although not in major ways).

More cognitive explanations of 'transfer' show that the L1 is still an important factor in SLA. It is doubtful that the the sequence of development is affected by the L1.

It is more likely that the appearance of specific grammatical features in the order of development of defferent LL scan be traced to their L1, perhaps as a result of the degree of markedness of the same features in the L1.

Learner Processes

H8: IL development occurs as a product of the learner's use of procedural knowledge to construct discourse.

N.B.

The learner has two types of knowledge: declarative and procedural.

Declarative knowledge is 'knowing that', it constitutes L2 rules and memorized chunks of lge.

Procedural knowledge is 'knowing how', it consists of the stategies and procedures employed by the learner to pricess L2 data for acquisition and for use.

When we talk about acquiring a L2, we normally mean 'declarative knowledge'.

a) L2 knowledge

1. Declarative knowledge

2. Procedural K

2.1. Social procedures/ strategies (devices for managing interaction in L2)

2.2. Cognitive procedures/ strategies

2.2.1. For learning L2 (devices for internalizing and automatizing L2)

2.2.2. For using

- 2.2.2.1. Production / reception procedures / strategies (devices for using existing resources automatically)
- 2.2.2.2. CSs (devices for compensating for inadequate resources).

N.B.

The main difference between LSs and CSs: the former refer to attempts to use existing L2 knowledge efficiently and clearly with a minimum of effort. The latter occur when the speaker is not able to communicate his original communicative goal in the way he planned to, and so is forced to reduce the goal or to locate alternative means to express it. CSs are the result of an initial failure to implement a production plan.

There are three (3) kinds of learner strategies:

Corollary (consequence) 1: the processes of hypothesis testing and formation, and automatization account for how the learner operates on input data, and determine the sequence and order of development.

Corollary 2: performance strategies account for the variable use of the learner's IL system in different contexts of use.

Corollary 3: CSs enable the learner to obtain comprehensible input, and also contribute to the variability of L2-learner L2 performance.

H9: IL development occurs as the product of the learner's universal grammar, which makes some rules easier to learn than others.

Linguistic output

H10: lge-learner lge consists of (1) formulaic lge and (2) utterances constructed creatively.

H11: lge learner lge is variable, dynamic and systematic.