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UNIT 1. EARLY ACQUISITION AND LEARNING OF SECOND LANGUAGES

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UNIT 1. EARLY ACQUISITION AND LEARNING OF SECOND LANGUAGES

1. Acquisition and learning

Many theories have tried to define the way how learning is produced, in order to understand, enhance and improve the process. Along history, methods of first language acquisition have been the model for second language learning (SLL).

Acquisition and *learning* a language are two different concepts. *Acquisition* is a subconscious development of language that takes places as a result of interaction and input. It is unintentional and it is based on the crucial necessity of communication.

Learning is the result of the direct instruction in the rules and structures. It is often an intentional process. It is a conscious and controlled process. A learner cannot communicate in a second language without the learning of extra aspects of language such as the pronunciation, the lexicon, and specific grammar.

1.1 Extra linguistic factors that will influence the process of learning and acquisition

- *Age:*

Both processes are different. The acquisition of the first language is biologically restricted from the moment we are born until the age of 6 or seven years old. However, learning a second language can be produced along all life time.

- *Psychologic Factors:*

Here we find the linguistic aptitude of the learner: the personal capacity for learning and the auto conscience. The personal capacity for learning includes a variety of abilities such as the ability to recognize phonetical patterns, to infer grammatical rules or to memorize. The auto conscience is related to the capacity of participation, autonomy and awareness of the learner during the learning process. The feeling of impotence or incapacity to express in the foreign language frequently provoke frustration and abandonment.

- *Sociologic Factors:*

Here we find the relation between languages and the attitude of the learner towards them. The attitude will be conditioned by the social and personal valuation of the language to learn and the sociolinguistic and cultural context of the learner.

- *Pedagogical Factors:*

The choice of methodologies and teaching resources is very important in the learning process. The ability to adapt those to the specific group of students (age, previous education, culture…) will be determinant.

As a conclusion, the result of learning a second language will be determined by different factors such as the age of the learner, the motivation and the framework and cognitive style of the learning context.

1.2 Summarize

- *Watch this video:*
- *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYYCTQIWPnA*

2. Theories of acquisition of second languages

The theories of second languages acquisition can be divided into three moments from the 40s until the present: in the 50s (Behavourism); 70' (Cognitive and mentalist psychology); the last 20 years (Socio-cultural theory).

2.1 Behavioural Theories (Skinner)

Learning a language is the changes in the observable behaviour of learners. Imitation is the clue of the learning process. The emphasis is on the necessity to learn to speak.

The process of learning is focused on learning a descriptive grammar in a deductive and implicit way, listening and repeating dialogues that included the linguistic structures that were to be learn. The outcome is to use language automatic and correctly. It is based on observable behaviours and imitation. It ignores mental activities. During the process, the learner is passively adapting to their environment and the instruction focuses on conditioning the learner's behaviour.

Skinner developed the *Verbal Behaviour* in 1957. He associates language learning with behaviourism in general psychology. For Skinner, all learning is the result of habit formation created through imitation, positive reinforcement and practice. So, language learning is a habit formation. Skinner specifies that speech habits are more efficiently established if the practice of imitation and correct response is reinforced by a reward.

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is usually connected to Behaviourism. It explains that on the contrary to a L1 (first language) learner, a L2 (Second language) learner already has a set of habits that will facilitate or difficult the process of habit formation in the learning a new language. The contrastive analysis explains that when a learner is learning a second language, a comparison between the L1 and the L2 will be produced. This analysis of comparison will show the similarities and differences between languages and teachers will be able to predict the kind of errors and where they will take place.

The main criticism to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was leaded by Chomsky who proclaimed that language competence cannot be explained by a model based on imitation and habit formation because each learner is different and there are innate cognitive structures. Speakers of a language can produce infinitive number of well-formed utterances. Moreover, not all the similarities guarantee a simple and error acquisition and not all contrast between L1 and L2 lead to learning difficulties.

2.1.1 Behavioural Learning characteristics:

- Implementation of audio-visual techniques.
- Practice of oral skills in a controlled environment.
- Emphasis on formation of habits through practice.
- Memorization and repetition of grammatical structures in isolation.
- Memorization of pronunciation and collocations.
- It leads to the implementation of audio-lingual techniques and practice, memorization and repetition of grammar structures. The Pattern Drill is one of the most typical activity of learning from the behavioural point of view.

Audio-lingual method was developed during the 1950s and 1960s. The teacher is a native speaker and an instructor who is guided by a scientific linguistic. So, materials and the chosen structures were the important element instead of the role and participation of the teacher.

Drilling is a type of exercise that is based on listening to a model, provided by the teacher, or a tape or another student, and repeating what is heard. This technique is still used to introduce new vocabulary. The teacher says (models) the word or phrase and the students repeat it. Other types of drill include substitution drills, or question and answer drills. Substitution drills can be used to practise different structures or vocabulary items (i.e. one or more words change during the drill).

Example:
Prompt: 'I go to work. He?'~
Response: 'He goes to work.'

In question and answer drills the prompt is a question and the response the answer. This is used for practising common adjacency pairs such as 'What's the matter?', 'I've got a (headache).' or 'Can I have a (pen) please?', 'Yes, here you are.' The words in brackets here can be substituted during the drill.

- Example:

THE PATTERN DRILL

T (teacher) S (student)

T – I used to play the piano
S – I used to play the piano
T – I used to play the piano years ago.
S – I used to play the piano when I was younger.

As we can see in the previous example, the teacher gives an example to the student and the second repeat it and modifies the last part.

- Practice: Invent a pattern drill

2.2 Cognitive Theories

They are developed in the 1970s thanks to the generativist approach and they overtook behaviourism as the dominant paradigm. It is more necessary to understand language than use it.

They were built on Chomsky's approach of learning and acquisition of language. According to that, all languages have common elements. Acquisition of language was based on innate reaction of learners, on the difference between the universal grammar and the own parameters of each language, and on the creativity of each learner. For that reason, the teaching of grammar contents had to be deductive and explicit and from a descriptive point of view. On the contrary of Behaviourism, cognitive theories highlight that explicit comparison between L2 and L1 can help the learner to see the similarities and learn L2 through his own L1.

The emphasis of the cognitive theories is on unobservable construct such as mind, memory, attitudes, thinking, motivation, internal processes. Changes in behaviour are observed but only as indicator to the learner's mental processes. Cognitivist are mainly interested in the learner as an individual and on the processes involved in learning L2. Learner is an active participant. They understand learning as the gradual automation of skills produced thanks to restructuring and linking new information to old knowledge.

A variety of methods will be born from the cognitivist approach: the total physical response of Asher; the silent method of Gattegno; the natural approach of Terrell and Krashen; and the suggestopedia of Lozanov. We will see them deeply in the Unit 2.

- Watch these videos and answer the questions:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cgpfw4z8cw
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gugvpoU2Ewo

1. According to the cognitive theories, how does the instruction have to be?

2. Explain the main teaching-resources explained in the video.

3. According to Chomsky, how does a kid learn to speak? Explain with your own words.

4. What is the Language Acquisition Device of Noam Chomsky?

3. Sociocultural Approach

Socio-cultural theories are based on Lev Vygotsky's work. Language is a socially constructed phenomenon, so language learning is a social activity, a mediation, because language is a tool for the mind to be able to link individual understanding of ourselves and particular contexts and situations within the world. Learners and the teacher are active participants in the socio-cultural activity.

This approach is based on the idea that all learning produced in the school has a previous story because each student is different and has lived different previous experiences. The communicative competence is the object of learning and study. Language is seen as a global and dynamic process. And interdisciplinary teaching is the chosen methodology to work on language.

From the sociocultural approach, learning a language depends on two elements: Interaction and Culture. Language learning needs a collaboration and interaction because it is how learners are able to appropriate and construct knowledge. On the other hand, learning about culture is a prerequisite for second language learning because it is what explains the socio-cultural factors implicated in the communication.

3.1 Main principles of the sociocultural approach:

Sociocultural approach is defined by three main principles: Regulation, Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development.

- Regulation: it means self-regulation and other-regulation. The first is the capacity for independent problem solving.

- Scaffolding is other-regulation. It indicates a person who needs help in solving problems and needs the expert to take control of the parts of a task that are beyond the learner's competence level.

- Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual development level, where the learner is able to do a task autonomously, and the potential development level, the stage of development where the learner can arrive with the guidance and help of the others.

3.2 Van Lier and the contingent interaction

Interaction is required to develop the learning. It is a process of reciprocity and the dialogue is needed. During the interaction, the participants share behaviours, intentions and wishes. Thanks to the dialogue, a connection bridge between familiar contents and new contents is built along with the expectations for the seconds. During this interaction where the bridge is created, the principles, actions and reflection of the teacher are also implicated. For Van Lier, this is the learning process.

3.3 Main representatives of the sociocultural approach:

- *Michael Halliday:* He tries to explain how the linguistic structure of a language is being built and formed due to the use of the language.
- *J.* Austin and J. Searle: The theory of Acts of Speech.
- *H. P. Grice:* Conversational maxims.
- *Henry Widdowson:* he studies the implications of the discourse analysis on learning a foreign language.
- *M.* P Breen and C. N Candlin: they defined the base of the Tasks approach.
- *D.* Hymes: concept of communicative competence. Later it was developed by M. Swain, L. Bachman and M. Canale.

3.3.1 Practice

- Watch this video and answer the questions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EpVTrBAr7g

5. What is the difference between interpersonal and intrapersonal concepts?

6. Explain what does the zone of proximal development work. Write some example.

4. Summarize

- Watch this video and answer the questions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jr_hK2Owq8o

7. What are the basic principles of behavioural theories?

8. What are the basic concepts of cognitive theories of language?

9. What are the three general principles of Sociocultural theories?

5. The concept of Interlanguage

Selinker coined the concept of *Interlanguage* in 1971. During the process of acquisition of L2 learners built transitional grammars which allow them to systematize acquired knowledge. These transitional grammars are labelled *interlanguages*. It is a gradual, dynamic and non-lingual process. This concept refers to the linguistic system evidenced when an adult second language learner attempts to express meanings in the L2.

5.1 Origins:

Between the 40s and 60s the contrastive analysis was developed, which proposed to identify the similar and different features between the mother tongue and the target language with the aim of achieving a more effective learning. This approach is based on the premise that when the two languages share certain traits these are familiar to the learner and are easy to learn. And if mistakes are identified in advance, the teacher is in a position to avoid them. The last contribution to be mentioned of this model is that it affirmed that the mother tongue negatively influenced the learning of the target language because it constitutes the source of errors and difficulties that would have to eradicate. Hence the term linguistic interference. In spite of the critics that this model obtained in the prediction of the errors of the students, yes it obtained a great achievement, to have initiated a line of investigation based on the student and its learning process, practically ignored until the moment.

At the end of the 60, the analysis of the errors of Pit Corder like one of its representatives arises. It was inspired by Chomsky's theory of mother tongue acquisition. this model assumes that it is normal to make mistakes when it is being learning a language because to make mistakes is the way to learn. Therefore, it proposes to study the mistakes that the learner commits when he is using the second language, to improve the learning. From the analysis of the mistakes made by apprentices of different mother tongues, a classification of errors was made: there were errors of interlanguage, those that were due to the influence of the mother tongue, and intralanguage errors, which are due to other causes such as overgeneration of rules, hypercorrection, simplification ....

5.2 Concept, goals and characteristics:

Interlanguage is the linguistic system of continuity between the mother tongue L1 and the L2 that a learner uses to learn a second language. It is a concept coined by Selinker in 1971 (Pastor, 2004: 105).

Interlanguages are characterized by three features. The first is its *variability:* an apprentice of a second language continually alters his linguistic productions, while making hypotheses, forming rules and expanding his knowledge of the target language. The second, they are *systematic*: despite their variability, a certain order is always maintained in the acquisition and development of sequences. Finally, they always receive an influence of the mother tongue, a linguistic transference, which, according to how it is exercised, can help or delay learning. For example, when patterns of the first language occur in the second, it produces errors and a delay in the learning process. However, there is also the Positive transfer, for example, when we apply strategies for the development of skills from the L1 such as the omission, Loans, among others.

The objective of the interlanguage research is to investigate the difference between the second language acquisition of a child learner against an adult learner because children always succeed in completely acquiring a L2, while adults rarely does. Children acquiring second languages are thought to have the ability to re-engage the LAD (language acquisition device) to avoid the error pattern and ultimate fossilization.

There are five psycholinguistic processes that shape interlanguage:

- Native language transfer: a learner of a L2 acquisition makes an interlingua identifications that can bring to difficulties. For example, the translation of "*mesa"* is "table". To understand the concepts "table of contents" or "Table the motion" can be difficult to acquire due to the native language transfer.

- Overgeneralization: to overgeneralize target language rules can bring difficulties and fossilization. For example, the English past tense ends in –ed. An overgeneralization of the rule will make the learner to think that all verbs, regulars or irregulars, will end in –ed in past tense: *drinked, goed* ... . Overgeneralization error shows evidences of the progress in learning.

- Transfer of training: it happens when the learner applies rules learned from instructors or textbooks. Sometimes, errors are produced and they are called *induced errors.*

- Strategies of communication: they are conscious attempts used to solve communication problems when the interlanguage systems seem to be unable to execute a communication task. For example, the use of words with general meaning such as "thing" or "tube" to explain specific concepts that learners don't know the words.

Returning to the analysis of errors, from this model also emerges the notion of fossilization (Baralo, 1996) which means that certain errors in the speech of a non-native can become permanent elements of his way of speaking or writing. One example is the "foreign accent", due to its persistence in its interlanguage, regardless of the apprentice's age or learning time. The only weak point is that this analysis considers only the errors of the learner for his study, instead of the whole of his production.

5.3 *The development of interlanguage:*

Steve Krashen proposed *The Monitor Model* in 1981, nine years later than Selinker. This model explained that when a second language learner, adult or children, acquire a second language unconsciously, there will be no evidence of native language transfer. It will be evidence when they learn it consciously.

The first interlanguage hypothesis was restricted only to adults. However, there was evidence later that showed that children in language immersion programmes also produce interlanguage. Children receive native speaker input only from their teacher but they have not been given enough opportunity to communicate meaningfully with others. This is what Swain calls "comprehensible output".

A second expansion of the interlanguage hypothesis occurred in response to the growing interest in the influence of universal grammar of natural languages. Language universals exist in human languages but interlanguages do no have to obey to language universals because they are a product of latent psychological structures, not of language acquisition devices.

A third modification was made when researchers discovered that interlanguage development vary depending on the context. Learners can produce a significantly, more fluent, grammatical and transfer-free interlanguage in some social context than in others.

The fourth modification was made about the fact of *fossilization*. No adult learner can ever speak a L2 such as native speaker because of the fossilization. It is caused by sociolinguistic forces. For example, Spanish speakers negate verbs: *Juan no va al cine* in English: *Juan no go.*

- Watch this video and answer the questions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqVRV1Wzthc

10. What is interlanguage?

11. What factors can affect interlanguage?

6. The treatment of Error in Language Teaching

Along history, errors have been treated differently depending on the moment of history. During the Behavioural theories, errors in second language learning were highly punished. Errors had to be corrected inmidiately. The technique of memorization, drill and "common errors list" among other activities were used in order to eliminate negative transference from the mother tongue. The interaction was based on stimulus – response – reinforcement (positive if it was correct and negative if there was an error).

During the 1960s, the conception changed. It was believed that there was a natural order in acquisition of target language. Independently of the learner, there are some elements that are difficult to be acquired.

Chomsky distinguished between *error* and *mistake. Error* is the incorrect use of language due to ignorance of some elements of language. It is an explicit knowledge. On the other hand, *mistake* includes all the incorrect uses of language. They are not corresponding to lack of knowledge, but on other internal or external factors such as fatigue or disturbing noise. So, errors belong to the competence and mistakes belong to the performance. After Chomsky, Corder considered errors as a guide on the language process. So, during the cognitive theories, errors were a sign of progress. The learning process followed the next stages: hypothesis formulation – checking – confirmation or reformulation.

At present communication and interaction are the main goals so and order of priority for item correction must be established with the aim of encouraging the learner's progress. The abuse of correction is believed to have negative effect because learners may feel unable to express themselves and be frustrated. However, the lack of correction is also negative. Learners need correction in order to progress but the way how we reach the errors is the key.

6.1 Strategies to correction

- Spotting the error:
  - *Can you repeat it?*
  - Repetition with rising intonation
  - A surprise expression on the teacher's face
  - Are you sure?

- Description of error: After spotting the error it is necessary to identify the rule. It is necessary to know what student wanted to say.

- Rephrasing: to replace the incorrect form. First, using the self-correction. Second, using the peer-correction.

6.2 Type of errors present in the learners of L2:

- Transfer: It is assumed that L2 grammar is similar to L1. For example, the translation of the Spanish sentence "tengo 12 años" into English: *I have got 12 years.*

- Simplification: use of adverbs to indicate verb tense. For example, *I go now. I go yesterday* (verb tense).

- Overgeneralization: English past tense ends in –ed. An overgeneralization of the rule will make the learner to think that all verbs, regulars or irregulars, will end in –ed in past tense: *drinked, goed.*

- Avoidance: the learner tries not to use unknown structures by periphrasis or renouncing expressions.

Graciela Vázquez (1999) and Sonsoles Fernández (1997) cited by Pastor (2004: 105) elaborates the classification criteria of the errors that we will see next. From the linguistic criterion, errors of addition or omission are distinguished (when adding an unnecessary element or not including another that is required in the target language), juxtaposition (when the corresponding connector is omitted), false placement (when subverting The order of words) and false selection (when a less appropriate or relevant term is chosen than another).

It is also possible to make a classification of errors from the linguistic point of view, according to the levels of analysis, in phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic, lexical, discursive and pragmatic errors.

Following the communicative criterion, there are errors that cause ambiguity, irritants, and stigmatizes. The former affects the understanding of the message as its meaning is not clear. The second are those who, for various reasons, can get annoying. Any mistake can become irritating to the interlocutor and even the apprentice as, a pronunciation or a word that is always wrongly repeated. Stigmatizers are those that, once committed, allow to identify the apprentice as belonging to a particular sociolinguistic group.

Following the pedagogical criterion, we find: transient errors versus permanent errors; Fossilized versus fossilized; Global (when affecting a sentence or text) versus local (in a word); Residual (referring to content taught at previous levels) versus current (actually expected); Individual versus collective; In each of the skills ... Identifying them according to the dual category will allow to act didactically more effectively to detect them, to seek the cause and to try to correct them.

Finally, from the pragmatic criterion, we find errors of appropriateness and pertinence (referring to the context in which communication takes place and taking into account the discursive characteristics of the target language) and cultural errors (which can give rise to misunderstandings) Oliveras, 2000, quoted by Pastor (2004)).

The third and next model is the analysis of the performance, which, tries to study the competence of the apprentice in the second language, therefore, not to study only the mistakes of the learner, but what is capable of producing in the language. From this model, research on acquisition (of morphemes, development sequences and forms and functions) (Pienemann, 1988) and research on the identification of strategies used by apprentices and learning styles (Fernández, 1996; Villanueva and Navarro, 1997).

The conclusions of the second researches recommend activities of both linguistic practice and reflection on the strategies themselves. What they advocate is that only by mastering the strategies a learner will be able to achieve an autonomous learning.

Finally, in the present, the model that prevails is that of discourse analysis, which is born as a need to attend not only to the performance of the learner, but also to the samples of language that he receives. This model investigates the relationship between the input that the learner receives (from the teacher, other native speakers and didactic materials) and the forms and development of their interlanguage. A fundamental part of this model is the analysis of the conversation, since it considers that in the learning of languages it is essential the existence of someone with whom to communicate, write, read, listen and respond. As a consequence of this latest orientation of the studies, fields of analysis such as communicative strategies are being developed; Speech to foreigners; Coherence and cohesion in the productions of apprentices; The linguistic alternation L1 / L2 in the classroom; The characteristics of the teacher's speech or the way in which the teacher corrects the mistakes.

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