

*Multiple perspectives on second language acquisition research**

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Five inter-disciplinary perspectives on second language (L2) acquisition (psycho-linguistic, socio-linguistic, neuro-linguistic, classroom research, and bilingual education) are brought together in this volume*, in which prominent researchers in each of the fields addressed give a substantive account of the work done and suggest the direction in which research seems to be going. When these perspectives are combined, the implications of L2 acquisition research for language teaching are also considered. It is claimed that L2 acquisition is not basically a psycho-linguistic phenomenon but the core phenomenon whereby the linguistic development of the learner in the L2 takes place (p. 1). Therefore it is argued that if the aim is to achieve a general overview of L2 acquisition, this should be addressed from the multiple inter-disciplinary perspectives stated above. Applied linguistics, bilingual education and foreign language teaching are supposed to benefit from the broad view of L2 acquisition provided by this survey of the field.

Psycho-linguistic issues in L2 acquisition

Herbert Seliger of Queens College, studies the psycho-linguistic aspects of L2 acquisition and highlights the two key historical milestones in the development of the field of L2 acquisition and the research in it undertaken, i.e. Chomsky's (1957) theory of grammar -theoretical linguistics- and Corder's (1967) distinction between systematic errors and random mistakes -applied linguistics. These events changed the perspective of viewing language as a set of habits -behaviourism- to understanding it as the mental representation of a set of abstract rules -mentalism- which led to the study of error analysis. The former deeply affected our view of language and the processes whereby it is acquired, the latter the way in which learners and the language produced by them were viewed. He divides psycho-linguistic studies of L2 acquisition into processing studies -i.e. description of the underlying psychological mechanism whereby a L2 is understood and produced- and acquisition studies -i.e. description of how the L2 is acquired or the interlanguage (IL) constructed -and focuses on three general issues dealt with by these studies.

First, when he addresses the issue of how learners develop their language and the processes involved, he elaborates on the concepts of IL (Selinker 1972), transitional competence (Corder 1967) and approximative systems (Nemser 1971) and the underlying processes which sustain them, concluding that hypothesis testing is the prime process of L2 acquisition. That is, when a learner is acquiring a L2, he acquires a grammar of it -i.e. a mental representation of his knowledge. And it takes him a long time to attain this. There was evidence that in the process of acquiring a grammar of the target language (TL), learners build a number of other grammars which are not the

same as the grammar of the TL. Researchers into L2 acquisition wanted a term for this idea of learning involving the construction of mental grammars which gradually approached the grammar of the TL.

Secondly, he deals with the role of previous knowledge, the first language (L1) in particular, in the development of a L2. He points out the inadequacy of classic contrastive analysis -structuralist and behaviourist- which stated that areas of difficulty for the learner would be those where his L1 and the TL were dissimilar, whereas similarity between both would enhance learning, i.e. would facilitate it. Research evidence contradicted these claims since not all errors could be traced to L1 interference. It was shown that linguistic differences between the two languages could not account either for the presence or the absence of transfer errors. It was also apparent that the main cause of errors was not the L1 but other factors -non-linguistic- had to be taken into account. Therefore, apart from L1 interference, it was necessary to resort to psychological explanations, i.e. the setting where L2 acquisition occurs, the learner's stage of development, etc. As a result, it became clear that the degree of linguistic difficulty does not correspond with that of learning difficulty (Dulay and Burt 1974; Bailey et al. 1974; Schachter 1974; Taylor 1975).

Finally, he addresses the way in which affective factors influence L2 acquisition, underlining the psychological characteristics which seem to foster learning (Rubin 1975; 1987; Stern 1975; Naiman et al. 1978; Schumann 1978; Krashen 1978; Brown 1981; Wenden 1987; 1991; Gillette 1987; Oxford 1990).

Overall, Seliger does not offer any simple correlation between psycho-linguistic issues and L2 acquisition, stressing the need to keep an open mind on the extreme complexity of the factors involved in this inter-relationship and on those that impinge on the interaction obtained.

Socio-linguistic and social psychological issues in L2 acquisition

Under the term 'socio-linguistic' approaches to L2 acquisition, Leslie M. Beebe, of Teachers College, Columbia University, in fact reviews both socio-linguistic and social psychological issues in relation to L2 acquisition. She states how strongly and for how long the influence of social factors such as age, class, and sex on linguistic performance has been felt even by non-specialists. She points out that since the 1950s socio-linguists -i.e. Gumperz, Fischer, Labov, Hymes, Fishman- have deeply changed the understanding of linguistic science, making clear the relationship between linguistic variation and social characteristics of speakers. Hence the actual delivery of messages has gained as much prominence in research as that already possessed by the hypothesized -ideal- intended message (p. 43). Socio-linguistic appropriateness explains why social factors determine a systematic variation in language performance. Competence has now to be viewed not only from a form-related linguistic perspective but from a socio-cultural standpoint as well.

Beebe argues that L2 research has also benefited from socio-linguistic research since an account has been offered of how variation can be systematically explained when it is considered as socially conditioned. Interlanguage analysis has also been

amenable to the application of scientific methods of enquiry. However, she underlines the difference between L2 and L1 performance, the former being developmentally incomplete and therefore using a limited and ever changing repertoire while adult native speakers have total command of their mother tongue. L1 socio-linguistics cannot be applied to L2 acquisition without taking into account the differences between the two kinds of performance. She also comments on the need to incorporate factors relating to the social psychology of language -i.e. the speakers' subjective feelings, values, and motives- due to the extreme importance they have in the kind of linguistic behaviour executed (Beebe 1985; Beebe and Giles 1984 in Beebe 1988).

She reviews literature dealing with both the objective social characteristics and the subjective feelings of the participants in a verbal context because she acknowledges that they are crucial to understand linguistic variation (p. 45). To do so, she first surveys five outstanding approaches in socio-linguistics and the social psychology of language with their respective mentors -leaders who initiated and shaped each of them- and secondly she examines the major issues relating to L2 acquisition and socio-linguistics (broadly defined) within each approach. These traditions are (i) the Labovian tradition (Labov 1972) or systematically patterned variation, (ii) the dynamic paradigm (Bickerton 1983), which explains change over time in L2 acquisition, (iii) the description of communicative competence (Hymes 1971) or the speaker's knowledge to make appropriate socio-linguistic use of the L2 in order to fulfil specific social functions, (iv) the social psychological approach known as speech accommodation theory (Giles and Byrne 1982), which explains variation in speech and, finally, (v) the approach that understands socio-linguistic variation in speech according to the effects that attitudes and motivations have on the ultimate success achieved by learners in mastering a L2 (Gardner 1985; Gardner and Lambert 1972).

Neuro-psychological issues in L2 acquisition

Fred Geenese, of McGill University, explores the research into the relationship between language and the brain, focusing his attention on three different neuro-psychological issues relevant to L2 acquisition. That is, (i) hemispheric differences in the localization of the first and second languages, (ii) language-specific effects and L2 processing and (iii) the existence of a critical, neuro-linguistically determined, period for L2 acquisition. He comments that while the first two issues relate to hemispheric involvement in L2 learning and processing, the third one refers to whether or not "... there are changes during the development of the nervous system that influence second language acquisition in important ways." (p. 97). According to the critical period hypothesis, before this critical period L2 acquisition is possible. After it, it becomes more difficult.

He reviews the historical background of present day research on the relationship between language functions and the brain, stating that early in the nineteenth century clinical examinations of aphasics were undertaken to discover "... what specific types of language impairment were associated with damage to different areas of the brain." (p. 81). Out of this research the notion of left-hemispheric dominance for language

emerged. He points out that close to reports on monolingual aphasia, reports on bilingual or polyglot aphasia also appeared, the latter being concerned with the relationship between the bilingual's languages and not merely with the localization of specific language functions, i.e. speech production or speech comprehension. They wanted to find out whether language processing was of the same type for either of the bilingual's languages and whether it occurred in the same brain areas. Genesee notes that although until recently this research was carried out with brain damaged individuals -aphasics-, since 1977 the development of neuro-psychological and electro-physiological techniques have permitted a considerable number of experiments to be undertaken on neuro-linguistically healthy bilinguals with intact brains.

In relation to the issue of the hemispheric localization of L1 and L2 languages, Genesee indicates that early researchers dealing with language organization in bilinguals thought that the L1 was located in the left hemisphere and the L2 in the right. In contrast, current conceptualizations of hemispheric specialization are more elaborate. Whereas early conceptualizations of left and right hemispheres emphasized differences in the types of stimuli amenable to be processed in each hemisphere -i.e. verbal stimuli (e.g. words) were processed in the left hemisphere, non-language stimuli (e.g. melodies) were processed in the right-, currently differences in processing modes of the two hemispheres are emphasized. That is, different modes of processing are lateralized, not types of stimuli. Thus, the left hemisphere processes information analytically and serially. The right hemisphere, holistically and in parallel. It is also thought that neither is the left hemisphere specialized in language processing nor the right in non-language functions. Rather, current concerns about the two hemispheres relate to the degree of their specialization, i.e. it is understood that neither of them is fully specialized to process information in certain ways but specialized only to some degree. He stresses that present thinking holds the view that language consists of different cognitive and perceptual components. The left hemisphere will process some of them and the right one will do the same with others. Therefore both hemispheres will deal with language processing, this conceptualization of hemispheric specialization being far more sophisticated than earlier views (pp. 84f.).

As not all languages have the same linguistic characteristics -i.e. phonetic languages vs. ideographic languages-, it is argued that different languages are represented differently in the brain -i.e. they involve different processing systems, e.g. phonological processing vs. visual processing. Consequently, it is thought that left and right hemispheres are called upon in different ways by each language type, i.e. propositional languages and phonetically based scripts are associated with left-hemispheric language processing and appositional languages and ideographic scripts are associated with right-hemispheric processing (p. 97).

Finally, the critical period hypothesis is discussed and the different alternatives to it reviewed. Genesee summarizes research findings on this issue and draws our attention to the available evidence for left-hemispheric specialization. This posits that it is already present by 5 years of age and maybe even at birth, in contrast to the critical period assertion which argues that it is completed around 9 or 12 years of age (Penfield and Roberts 1959) -the emphasis here is on general neurological plasticity- or after

puberty (Lenneberg 1967) -where the emphasis is now on hemispheric specialization of function. He also underlines (1) the relevance of considering the possibility of intra-hemispheric changes in localization with development and (2) the need to take into account that neural plasticity changes progressively with age. In some cases it may extend beyond puberty (p. 99). That is, there is not one critical period but many. In sum, language is currently viewed "... as a continuously developing, fully integrated, multicomponential skill." (p. 100). Here, other non-neuro-physiological factors such as cognitive, affective, and social ones need to be addressed in order to account for the different rates of full bilingualism found at different ages (Neufeld 1979 in Beebe 1988; Krashen 1982).

Genesee ends his contribution to this volume recalling the goal of research on brain-language relations: to achieve an understanding of the neuro-psychological basis of language learning, language representation and language processing. He also reminds us of the need to exercise caution when trying to apply research findings on L2 pedagogy and classroom practice, since successful language learning is crucially interwoven with the development of new educational programmes and not merely dependent on the simplistic application of these findings.

The issue of formal instruction in L2 acquisition

Michael Long, of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, scrutinizes research which has addressed the effect of instruction on interlanguage development, and states that recent L2 acquisition research findings have rightly shaken quite a large number of unsubstantiated pronouncements on the efficacy of different methods and techniques for language teaching, making it necessary to thoroughly investigate classroom language teaching and the L2 promotion it actually fosters. He notes that out of this research, both in North America (Dulay and Burt 1977) and in Europe (Felix 1981), the common characteristics of untutored and instructed L2 acquisition due to a common underlying acquisition process, i.e. universal processing abilities and innate language learning strategies, became apparent. Thus, the contribution of the learner to the learning process was recognized and the joint partnership of the teacher and the learner acknowledged. As a result of the studies that showed the inefficacy of instruction, Long argues that many conclusions on the limitations of instruction were reached without having in fact investigated the outcome of the instruction but merely compared the similarities of the ILs of untutored and instructed learners. For this reason he undertakes a stringent review of the different studies which focused on the role of instruction in L2 acquisition in an attempt both to show the inadequacy of many of these studies to actually probe the effects of formal instruction and, inversely, to demonstrate that they have in fact revealed potential positive contributions of instruction (pp. 118f.).

He starts with the effect of instruction on acquisition processes. By exploring L2 acquisition literature that deals with this issue, he discovers that some of these processes have been related to various contextual factors -i.e. pidginization and fossilization- and others to the demands imposed by certain kinds of performance tasks

-i.e. transfer and restrictive simplification. Taking these findings into account, and in spite of the fact that they mainly concern untutored L2 learning, he claims the utility of contextual variation in order to understand instructed acquisition. In his view, two major options encapsulate the varied selection from which L2 instruction chooses, i.e. the different methodologies, materials and syllabuses. One of these options relates to the modifications made to the linguistic input with which learners are provided -i.e. the sequence in which different linguistic features are presented to them, the frequency with which they are met, and the saliency of those encounters. The other option refers to the kinds of production tasks imposed on learners, whether they (i) allow, or prohibit, errors happening, (ii) encourage the taking of linguistic risks or (iii) whether attention to speech is fostered. Long stresses that exploratory work on the effect of instruction on acquisition processes has focused on the similarities revealed between naturalistic and tutored acquirers (Felix 1981; Wode 1981 in Beebe 1988). Pica's stimulating and major study (1983) looked not only for the similarities but also for the differences. It distinguished three acquisition contexts: naturalistic, instructed, and mixed. It was found that the three learner types showed similarities in their morpheme acquisition orders, i.e. (i) learner factors, not contextual or environmental factors, determine a large part of L2 acquisition, and (ii) the effect of instruction on production is to generate an excess of grammatical morphology and to inhibit the use of ungrammatical constructions such as those found in pidgins (pp. 122f.).

Long agrees with Pica when she cautiously states that these findings do not permit conclusions to be drawn about acquisition rate or ultimate success achieved but only about L2 production. It would be necessary, he adds, to research into the possible long-term effects of these differing conditions of L2 exposure that seem to affect the way learners tackle the learning process, i.e. the hypotheses they construct about the TL and the approach they undertake to use their L2 resources. He also points out that this work remains to be done, hence positive effects of formal instruction cannot be discarded yet (Lightbown 1983).

When addressing the effect of instruction on acquisition sequences, Long refers to the Quebec findings (Lightbown, Spada and Wallace 1980, among others; see Beebe 1988) and to Pienemann's (1984) study which indicate that formal instruction cannot subvert the order of acquisition of particular linguistic features, i.e. developmental features, since there is a sequence of development for their acquisition and learners have to progress to this developmental sequence. Each stage of this sequence represents a set of processing strategies through which learners have necessarily to proceed. Among the grammatical structures that are perceived as developmental are the German word order rules and, in English, negation and interrogation. It thus seems that the sequence by which learners acquire certain types of linguistic knowledge cannot in fact be altered by instruction. That is, instruction in terms of the developmental sequence is highly restrictive. A condition learners must fulfil in order to learn these developmental structures is the psycho-linguistic readiness to process them, i.e. Pienemann's (1984 198ff.; 1985, 36f.) learnability/teachability hypothesis. On the other hand, there are structures -i.e. BE copula, progressive *-ing*, or prepositions- that are variational since they can be acquired at different times by different learners and they are certainly not

acquired in a fixed sequence. Hence, a very complex relationship between instruction and learning emerges from these research results.

Long comments that although the effect of instruction on the rate of L2 acquisition is theoretically less interesting than the possibility of changing the sequence of learning since it merely indicates that instruction does have an effect but does not account for how it comes about, he nevertheless addresses this issue due to its importance for teachers and learners. He recalls his own review (Long 1983) of a number of relevant studies to this research question and complements it with two additional studies carried out since. His conclusion is that instruction does lead to more rapid language learning.

Finally, dealing with the long-term effects of instruction on the L2 proficiency achieved, he posits that even less work has been done in this area. However, from the evidence available it seems that conscious awareness of what the input consists of has a bearing on intake, i.e. learning results from it. (Swain 1985; Schmidt and Frota 1986).

L2 acquisition from the perspective of bilingual education programmes

Jim Cummins, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, looks at L2 acquisition, taking into account what can be learnt about it from the experience gathered in bilingual education programmes, namely their effectiveness. He contends that in spite of the contextual differences under which these programmes have been implemented in Canada and in the United States, the research findings are fully consistent in both countries and provide evidence of "... certain basic universal principles of second language acquisition." (p. 145).

He attempts to clarify some of the apparent contradictions in the data which emerge from the bilingual education programmes as they have been undertaken in each of these countries, showing that such data support the principles mentioned above. For this reason he deals with the controversial U.S. context first, outlining the evolution of the debate on the bilingual education policy and underlining the rationale for bilingual schooling. This rationale argued that the fundamental causal factors for the low achievement of minority students -i.e. those whose language is non-English (e.g. minority or subordinate language background students) -were social in nature, language being an intervening variable, and that initial L1 instruction had potential benefits as it would facilitate home-school relationships and so promote a healthy self-image among the minority children. It would also ensure that the children would not fall behind in academic content while they were learning English (p. 146) (Paulston 1976; Gaarder 1977; both in Beebe 1988). The rationale for bilingual education was challenged (Epstein 1977 in Beebe 1988) on the basis that the language factor itself could not solve the educational difficulties of minority students in the United States -an argument not disputed by the advocates of bilingual schooling- and fuelled existing fears that the ultimate goal of these bilingual programmes was simply to increase Hispanic political power. However, a report (Troike 1978 in Beebe 1988) made on the results of 12 bilingual programme evaluations which met the criteria of methodological adequacy attested to the benefits of bilingual education, i.e. this kind of education effectively meets the goals of equal educational opportunity for minority language children.

Opposing claims on the best educational means to help children learn English were based on whether there is a direct relationship between English achievement and exposure to English -i.e. English-only immersion programmes proponents- or whether high levels of oral and literate proficiency in both L1 and L2 can be achieved through bilingual programmes -i.e. transitional bilingual programmes proponents. Cummins assesses the validity of these claims on bilingual education by examining the findings of bilingual programme evaluations. Nevertheless he warns us to distinguish clearly between the success of L2 bilingual immersion programmes for majority students -i.e. in Canada, where English-background students attend bilingual or 'French immersion' programmes -and the proposal of L2 monolingual immersion programmes for minority students- i.e. programmes that involve English-only instruction with no attempt being made to ease comprehension by manipulating the L2 input -as alternatives to transitional bilingual programmes, specially when these proposals are made on the basis of the success of bilingual programmes (p. 150).

From his review of the empirical and theoretical literature, he draws two theoretical generalizations consistent with the research data, i.e. the common underlying proficiency generalization and the sufficient comprehensible input generalization. The former suggests that L1 and L2 academic skills are interdependent, i.e. manifestations of an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages and which allows the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills across languages. The latter indicates that mere exposure to the L2 is not enough for acquisition to take place. Comprehensible input is a necessary condition for it to happen (Long 1983b; Wong Fillmore 1983; both in Beebe 1988). Cummins concludes that these findings, on one hand, go against the 'linguistic mismatch' and 'maximum exposure' arguments which opposed the bilingual education rationale, and, on the other hand, support its pedagogical views (Cummins and Swain 1986).

Pedagogic implications from the combined perspectives on L2 acquisition

Scovel, of San Francisco State University, in an attempt to bridge research and theory to curriculum design and classroom practice, from the various fields dealt with above selects some points which seem relevant to language teaching. However, from the outset he emphasizes the need to keep in perspective the broad array of issues brought out by each researcher, so as to capture the complexity of language learning and teaching. He propounds that multiple perspectives make for singular teaching because a unified eclecticism can be derived from them and awareness of them by the teacher will enhance his teaching performance. That is, there is a relationship between theoretical concerns and practical applications (pp. 169f.).

In relation to the psycho-linguistic perspective, Scovel considers that Chomsky's generative grammar is particularly relevant to the field of L2 acquisition because it has called our attention to 'deep structure' analysis and has insisted on the need to distinguish between surface structures and their underlying abstract representation. He points out its limitation of ignoring the pragmatic use of language. Corder's emphasis on distinguishing systematic errors from random mistakes is also considered primary

since it captures the central role displayed by the learner, not the teacher, in the language learning process. Current psycho-linguistic insights to our understanding of L2 learning errors -i.e. transfer, overgeneralization, markedness and avoidance- are also reviewed.

Concerning the contributions made by the socio-linguistic perspective to L2 pedagogy, Scovel centres on how much it has helped us to understand IL variation, i.e. its systematicity, and the relative relevance that 'attention to speech' actually has in achieving L2 fluency and accuracy. Communicative competence should prevail unless the situation in which the language is used demands that the L2 formal properties be analysed.

When he addresses Genesee's review of brain research, he agrees with his perspective on the contribution that neuro-psychology can make to L2 learning. That it is one thing to know where in the brain language is located, but quite another to be able to account for how either the L1 or L2 is learnt. Psycho-linguistics more than neuro-psychology or neuro-linguistics seems better able to inform us how learning is accomplished. Hence, knowledge of the brain does not seem to be the best asset in choosing appropriate methods, techniques or materials.

Scovel, on the contrary, believes that classroom-centred research can contribute to pedagogy, thus constituting a rich source of application to L2 teaching. However, he does not overlook the diversity and complexity of human learning behaviour and urges us to take research findings cautiously, more as insights and guidance than as firm and simplistic answers (p. 183). The value of formal instruction and emphasis on form is stressed, and so is the importance of investigating the effectiveness of instruction taking into account the learner's psycho-linguistic readiness for what he is taught (Lightbown 1983; Pienemann 1984; 1985).

Finally, bilingual education programmes are tackled and the implications for language pedagogy outlined. It is acknowledged that bilingual researchers have collected invaluable information on the way children acquire a L2, information of major relevance to adult L2 acquisition. It is also recognized how essential it is to be open to the new insights that can be gathered from current research data, even when they challenge conventional wisdom, if we really want to bridge theory and practice and advance in the language teaching profession by adequately assessing how theory can indirectly influence practice. It seems that new methods and techniques should be grounded in the principles of a coherent theory of language acquisition, thus offering practitioners insights into classroom procedure of significant and not merely fashionable nature.

In sum, it can be said that this book is of great interest for all those concerned with language study and language teaching since it provides a substantive account of the state of the art in L2 acquisition from many perspectives in the field.

Note

- * Beebe, M. (ed.) (1988) *Issues in Second Language Acquisition: Multiple Perspectives*, New York: Newbury House, 190 pp.

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