LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN A SECOND LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract - Language acquisition is the process whereby children acquire their first languages. First language becomes an important thing as a basic language for human. Acquisition (as opposed to learning) depends on children receiving linguistic input during the critical period. The critical period is defined as the window of time, up to about the age of twelve or puberty, in which humans can acquire first languages. Language plays an institutional and social role in the community. It functions as a recognized means of communication among members who speak some other language as their native tongue. Language acquisition is the unconscious process in learning a language. Children exposed to a language at an early age internalize rules with the aid of which they are able to generate sentences. There are some theories of second language acquisition can be broadly classified into Behaviorist theory, Nativist Theory, Cognitive theory, and Social Interactionist Theory.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, SLA, communication

Introduction

All humans (without exceptional physical or mental disabilities) have an innate capability to acquire language. Children may acquire one or more first languages. For example, children who grow up in an environment in which only English is spoken and heard will acquire only English as their first language. However, children who grow up in an environment in which both German and English are spoken and heard equally will acquire both German and English as their first languages. Acquisition occurs passively and unconsciously through implicit learning. In other words, children do not need explicit instruction to learn their first languages but rather seem to just "pick up" language in the same way they learn to roll over, crawl, and walk. Language acquisition in children just seems to happen.

Acquisition (as opposed to learning) depends on children receiving linguistic input during the critical period. The critical period is defined as the window of time, up to about the age of twelve or puberty, in which humans can acquire first languages. Children must receive adequate linguistic input including phonology (speech sounds), semantics (vocabulary and meaning), grammar (syntax or word order and morphology or grammatical markers), and pragmatics (use and context) and prosody (intonation, rhythm, stress) before the end of the critical period in order to acquire their first languages. If linguistic input is not adequate, children will never fully acquire language (as is the case of Genie, an abused and neglected girl who was discovered by authorities in 1970). Language acquisition

cannot normally occur after the critical period because the brain becomes "hardwired" to the first language.

When we know much about language, it will make us to be successful in teaching of a second language. However, the gap between a child acquiring his first language and a child learning a second language, at a time when he already possesses language, is likely to be so big that any direct application of our knowledge is difficult, the more so because our knowledge in the first place is still extremely shaky.

Most recent studies of the acquisition of syntax have been concerned with the linguistic competence of the children at different stages of their linguistic development and an effort has been made to write generative grammars for these stages. The investigators have been interested in the obtained data only to the extent that they throw light on the child's system of internalized rules for generating language. A distinction is made between performance – the actual utterances – and the underlying competence on which performance is based.

Linguistic theory should provide an adequate characterization of the native speaker's knowledge of his language, i.e. the native speaker's intuition of what is grammatical in his language should be capable of being described in a logically consistent way. Even if it were possible, to give a descriptively adequate account of an adult native speaker's linguistic competence, an adequate description of a child's competence is very much more difficult, both because the child's intuition of what is grammatical is not available and also because the child's competence is continually developing.

The sentence singled out for closer scrutiny were interrogative and negative sentences of the kind that in adult language require a do-transformation. These are of particular interest because the comparable sentences in Norwegian are made by inversion of subject noun phrase and verb.

Only negative and interrogative sentences have been singled out in the study for analysis. However, some examples of declarative sentences were included for comparative purposes. Being semantically empty it does not appear as a morpheme in deep structure and the task of the learner of English is to discover the particular function of do as a tense carrier. This might help to explain the reason why do-transformations constitute a particular difficulty for foreign learners of English. In this respect do has not the same status as the modal auxiliaries, which behave, along with have and be, roughly in the same way as the equivalent auxiliaries in Norwegian.

Definition of Second Language

A **second language** or **L2** is any language learned after the first language or

mother tongue. Some languages, often called auxiliary languages, are used primarily as second languages or lingua francas (such as Esperanto).

A person's first language may not be their dominant language, the one they use most or are most comfortable with. For example, the Canadian census defines first language for its purposes as "the first language learned in childhood and still spoken", recognizing that for some, the earliest language may be lost, a process known as language attrition. This can happen when young children move, with or without their family (because of immigration or international adoption), to a new language environment.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition (Sla)

The distinction between **acquiring** and **learning** was made by Stephen Krashen (1982) as part of his Monitor Theory. According to Krashen, the acquisition of a language is a natural process; whereas learning a language is a conscious one. In the former, the student needs to partake in natural communicative situations. In the latter, error correction is present, as is the study of grammatical rules isolated from natural language. Not all educators in second language agree to this distinction; however, the study of how a second language is

learned/acquired is referred to as Second Language Acquisition or SLA.

Research in SLA focuses on the developing knowledge and use of a language by children and adults who already know at least one other language... [and] a knowledge of second language acquisition may help educational policy makers set more realistic goals for programmes for both foreign language courses and the learning of the majority language by minority language children and adults (Spada & Lightbown, p. 115).

Theories of second language acquisition can be broadly classified into:

1. Behaviorist theory, dominated both psychology and linguistics in the 1950's. This theory suggests that external stimuli (extrinsic) can elicit an internal response which in turn can elicit an internal stimulus (intrinsic) that lead to external responses. The learning process has been described by S-R-R theorists as a process forming stimulus-response-reward chains. These chains come about because of the nature of the environment and the nature of the learner. The environment provides the stimuli and the learner provides the responses. Comprehension or production of certain aspects of language and the environment provide the reward. Imitation provides the learner with a repertoire of appropriate, productive responses. The learner learns to imitate or approximate

the productive responses provided by the environment.

2. Nativist Theory**,** views language acquisition as innately determined. Theorists believe that human beings are born with a built-in device of some kind that predisposes them to acquire language.This predisposition is a systematic perception of language around us, resulting in the construction of an internalized system of language.Chomsky (1965) claimed the existence of innate properties of language that explain a child's mastery of his/her native language in a short time despite the highly abstract nature of the rules of language. This innate knowledge, according to Chomsky, is embodied in a "little black box" of sorts called a Language Acquisition Device (LAD).McNeill (1966) described the LAD as consisting of four innate linguistic properties:the ability to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds in the environment, the ability to organize linguistic events into various classes that can be refined later, knowledge that only a certain kind of linguistic system is possible and that other kinds are not andthe ability to engage in constant evaluation of the developing linguistic system in order to construct the simplest possible system out of the linguistic data that are encountered.

3. Cognitive theory**,**views human beings as having the innate capacity to develop logical thinking. This school of thought was influenced by Jean Piaget's work where he suggests that logical thinking is the underlying factor for both linguistic and non-linguistic development.The process of association has been used to describe the means by which the child learns to relate what is said to particular objects or events in the environment. The bridge by which certain associations are made is meaning. The extent and accuracy of the associations made are said to change in time as the child matures.Cognitivists say that the conditions for learning language are the same conditions that are necessary for any kind of learning. The environment provides the material that the child can work on.Cognitivists also view the role of feedback in the learning process as important for affective reasons, but non-influential in terms of modifying or altering the sequence of development.

4. Social Interactionist Theory**y**supports the view that the development of language comes from the early interactions between infants and caregivers.Human language emerged from the social role that language plays in human interaction, the environment plays a key role in language development, adults in the child's linguistic environment are viewed as

instrumental in language acquisition, and Social interactions are the key element in language processing and input from social interactions provides a model for negotiation opportunities.

Other dominant theories and points of research include 2nd language acquisition studies (which examine if L1 findings can be transferred to L2 learning), verbal behavior (the view that constructed linguistic stimuli can create a desired speech response), morpheme studies, behaviorism, error analysis, stages and order of acquisition, structuralism (approach that looks at how the basic units of language relate to each other according to their common characteristics), 1st language acquisition studies, contrastive analysis (approach where languages were examined in terms of differences and similarities) and inter-language (which describes L2 learners' language as a rule-governed, dynamic system) (Mitchell, Myles, 2004).

These theories have all had an impact on second language teaching and pedagogy. There are many different methods of second language teaching, many of which stem directly from a particular theory. Common methods are the grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method (clearly influenced by audio-lingual research and the behaviorist approach), the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, community language learning, the Total Physical Response method, and the communicative approach (highly influenced by Krashen's theories) (Doggett, 1994). Some of these approaches are more popular than others, and are viewed to be more effective. Most language teachers do not use one singular style, but will use a mix in their teaching. This provides a more balanced approach to teaching and helps students of a variety of learning styles succeed.

Language Acquisition in Second Language Environment

This example is a study of a Norwegian six-year-old child's acquisition of English syntax in a second language environment.

1. Declarative sentences.

The following typical declarative sentences have been included for comparative purposes:

(i) All crying.

We climbing Friday.

I drawing and do something.

I fall down again (i. e. prob.fill).

(ii) He can see the moon.

I will hear what you will say.

(iii) I have say it.

I have lost it.

I have eating and play.

On the basis of data of the kind represented by (i) above we would suggest, very tentatively, the following rule:

$$S \rightarrow NP + (be) + {V \atop V} + (X) + (adv.\ t.)$$

Both modals and have been excluded. Rune uses have for completed' aspect, but the participle morpheme, -en, is not normally realized. The only available verb-forms at this stage are, on the whole, verb-stem (V) or Ving. That V and Ving are not free variants, except possibly in (i) above, is indicated by the almost exclusive use of V in sentences with modal auxiliaries. The following obtained sentences shuttered in succession illustrate this:

I singing out yesterday.

I can sing Blaydon Races for you.

We can only venture a guess why Rune makes such an extensive use of the ing-Form of the main verb, more often than not without the auxiliary be. Is it because he has been exposed to English at an early stage so frequently in situations where the present progressive is used that he has generalized his own usage on this basis? Interference, from Norwegian is out of the question as Norwegian has no expanded tense form.

The concept of tense is available to Rune, but he appears not to have discovered how to realize it in English. Time relations are sometimes expressed by help of an adverb of time as in the obtained sentences. I singing now/yesterday/all the day (i. e. every day).The non- occurrence of -ing with such verbs as like and think and the fact that be occurs optionally only in the context of Ving, not V, might indicate a beginning differentiation between the simple and progressive forms.

2. Negative Sentences

In adult grammar do is used when the verb phrase does not contain another auxiliary verb. As with the modal auxiliaries the negative element, not, follows or is attached to do and not to V. The sentences below exemplify the similarities between the use of modal auxiliaries and do in negative sentences in English as contrasted with Norwegian :

I cannot com   Jeg kan ikke komme.

I could not come   Jeg kunne ikke komme.

He does not work   Han arbeider ikke (he works not).

We did not take it   Vi tok det ikke (we took it not).

Since do is not yet available at Time 1,one prediction would be that Rune, in keeping with Norwegian structure, let's not follow the main verb and produces sentences of the form NP + VP +not. What we find, however, are such sentences as I not like that, one is not crying, I not looking for edge. The negative sentences at this stage correspond to the pattern for declarative sentences. We need only insert not after the subject NP in our formula.

3. Interrogative Sentences

The following types of interrogative sentences, all of them requiring do in adult grammar, were studied:(i) sentences beginning with a question word (what, when, etc.), (ii) sentences requiring yes or no as an answer, (iii) negative versions of (ii), (iv) negative questions beginning with why.

Again we find a high degree of syntactic similarity between English and Norwegian in the use of modal auxiliaries and have ("ha"), but there is no equivalent to do as shown by the following examples:

[1] What did he say?   Hva sa han? (what said he?)

[2] Don't you like ice-cream?   Liker du ikke iskrem? (Like you not ice-cream?)

[3] Why don't you like ice-cream? Hvorfor liker du ikke iskrem (Why like you not ice cream?)

[4] Did you do it? Gjorde du det? (Did you it?)

A reasonable prediction would be that Rune at Time 1 would make use of Norwegian syntactic structure to form English sentences of the types in brackets above, i. e. by inversion of subject NP and V. If do is semantically empty, these sentences differ from-adult grammar only in their transformational history. They would soundforeign, but would be perfectly understandable.

4. The Development of do as a Tense Marker

Do occur from the beginning frequently in the context of a few isolated verbs, where it is probably a lexical variant of not, e. g. I don't know, I don't think, it doesn't matter. It is probably with this meaning that it has spread by analogy to I don't will more, I don't talking to you andI don't say something more. It appears also at Time 2 in the elliptical sentence Do you?, a case incidentally where Norwegian has a similar construction. I think we can safely say that the auxiliary do is absent from Rune's speech at this stage.

The next occurrence of **do** is found at Time 2 in the context of **you**, most likely as a variant of **you**, pronounced (dju). Unfortunately the translation test for Time 2 was not recorded and it can therefore not be checked for pronunciation. However, the conversation data for Time 2 have been carefully checked and all eight occurrences were pronounced {dju :].When What d'you like ? was asked to be repeated slowly, Rune repeated it as 'What 'you 'like. It is not unthinkable that do is acquired by children by first being a variant of you.

Time 3 is a transition stage. Do is clearly emerging as a tense carrier. The fact that Rune is now in the middle of a process of acquiring do is likely to be responsible for the greater lack of stability found at this stage than at the other times of observation. It is as if Rune is searching for a morpheme to attach tense to. The

following examples illustrate the vacillation:

I not sitting on the chair.

I don't sit on the chair.

What d'you do to-yesterday?

What d'you did to-yesterday?

When d'you went there?

What you did in Rothbury?

What you doin the hayshed?

Like you ice-cream?

Did you drive car to-yesterday?

By Time 4 do has clearly emerged as a separate element, with both a present and past tense form. Did is more often than not used in sentences requiring the past tense, but there are also examples which show that the distinction is not fully established. Where do occurs it is almost invariably followed by the infinitive form of the main verb.

Contrary to the findings of Susan M. Ervin6), there does not appear to be any significant time lag between the introduction of do into negative and interrogative sentences in Rune's case. This might be accounted for, however, by Rune's greater linguistic maturity and faster rate of learning.

At this stage yes/no-questions, both negative and affirmative, also fall into line with Q-wh-sentences as shown by the following examples: Did you not see on T. V. to-yesterday?as compared with the Time 3 See you not on T. V. to-yesterday?

and Did you not say it to daddy?, Don't you like me,Reidun? as compared with the Time 3 Say it you not to daddy, Like you me not, Reidun?. Except for the Q-why-Neg-sentences, which throughout the time of study have consistently been of the type why + NP + not +VP(or alternatively why + not +NP + VP), the other structures understudy should at Time 4 be capable of being described by a single set of related rules, as is the case in adult grammar. These are by no means as stable as in adult grammar. Rune still frequently produces sentences which syntactically correspond to earlier structures.

Conclusion

Language plays an institutional and social role in the community. It functions as a recognized means of communication among members who speak some other language as their native tongue. Language acquisition is the unconscious process in learning a language. Children exposed to a language at an early age internalize rules with the aid of which they are able to generate sentences.

The situation of the learner of a second language is clearly different from that of the L1 child. The most obvious difference is that the task of the foreign learner is not to learn 'language', which he already possesses and the knowledge of which must affect his acquisition of a second language. The process of learning the second language might

therefore conceivably be qualitatively different. Nor is he very often exposed to 'primary linguistic data' in the sense that an L1 learner is, but rather to carefully graded language items presented in small doses for a few hours a week.

We do not know if second language acquisition can be speeded up by the children being exposed to selected and linguistically graded language patterns. And even if we have accepted that language learning is not merely a question of habit formation and reinforcement of correct responses, we cannot exclude the possible transfer value of well-established basic sentence patterns, especially if they are acquired in contextalized situations.

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