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* **Introduction**

Some children grow up in a social environment where more than one language is used and are able to acquire a second language in circumstances similar to those of first language acquisition. Those fortunate individuals are bilingual. However, most of us are not exposed to a second language until much later and our ability to use a second language, even after years of study, rarely matches ability in our first language. a number of different approaches have been proposed to help learners become as effective communicating in a second language (L2) as they are in their first language (L1).

* **Second language learning**
* A distinction is sometimes made between learning in a ‘foreign language’ setting (learning a language that is not generally spoken in the surrounding community) and a ‘second language’ setting (learning a language that is spoken in the surrounding community). In either case, they are simply trying to learn another language, so the expression **second language learning** is used more generally to describe both situations.
* **Acquisition and learning**
* A more significant distinction is made between acquisition and learning. The term **acquisition** is used to refer to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations with others who know the language. The term **learning,** however, applies to a more conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the features, such as vocabulary and grammar, of a language, typically in an institutional setting. (Mathematics, for example, is learned, not acquired.)
* **Acquisition barriers**
* Very few adults seem to reach native-like proficiency in using a second language. There are individuals who can achieve great expertise in the written language, but not the spoken language. This might suggest that some features of a second language, such as vocabulary and grammar, are easier to learn than others such as pronunciation. This type of observation is sometimes taken as evidence that, after the critical period for language acquisition has passed, around the time of puberty, it becomes very difficult to acquire another language fully
* Against this view, it has been demonstrated that students in their early teens are quicker and more effective second language learners in the classroom than, for example, seven-year-olds. It may be, of course, that the effective learning of a second language requires a combination of factors. The optimum age for learning may be during the years from about ten to sixteen when the flexibility of our inherent capacity for language has not been completely lost, and the maturation of cognitive skills allows a more effective analysis of the regular features of the second language being learned.
* **Affective factors**
* If there is a strong element of unwillingness or embarrassment in attempting to produce the different sounds of another language, then it may override whatever physical and cognitive abilities there are. If this self-consciousness is accompanied by a lack of empathy with the other culture, then the subtle effects of not really wanting to sound like a Russian or a German or an American may strongly inhibit the learning process.
* This type of emotional reaction, or ‘affect’, may also be caused by dull textbooks, unpleasant classroom surroundings or an exhausting schedule of study and/or work. All these negative feelings or experiences are **affective factors** that can create a barrier to acquisition. Basically, if we are stressed, uncomfortable, self-conscious or unmotivated, we are unlikely to learn anything.
* **Focus on method**

Despite all these barriers, the need for instruction in other languages has led to a variety of educational approaches and methods aimed at fostering second language learning. Many recent approaches designed to promote second language learning have tended to reflect different theoretical views on how a second language might best be learned.

* **The grammar–translation method**
* The most traditional approach is to treat L2 learning in the same way as any other academic subject. Vocabulary lists and sets of grammar rules are used to define the target of learning, memorization is encouraged, and written language rather than spoken language is emphasized. This method has its roots in the traditional teaching of Latin and is described as the **grammar–translation method.**
* **The audiolingual method**

Avery different approach, emphasizing the spoken language, became popular in the middle of the twentieth century. It involved a systematic presentation of the structures of the second language , moving from the simple to the more complex, in the form of drills that the student had to repeat. This approach, called the **audiolingual method**, was strongly influenced by a belief that the fluent use of a language was essentially a set of ‘habits’ that could be developed with a lot of practice.

* **Communicative approaches**
* More recent revisions of the second language learning experience can best be described as **communicative approaches**. They are partially a reaction against the artificiality of ‘pattern-practice’ and also against the belief that consciously learning the grammar rules of a language will necessarily result in an ability to use the language. They are based on a belief that the functions of language (what it is used for) should be emphasized rather than the forms of the language (correct grammatical or phonological structures).
* **Focus on the learner**
* The most fundamental change in the area of L2 learning in recent years has been a shift from concern with the teacher, the textbook and the method to an interest in the learner and the acquisition process. For example, one radical feature of most communicative approaches is the toleration of ‘errors’ produced by students. Just as children acquiring their first language produce certain types of ungrammatical forms at times, so we might expect the second language learner to produce similar forms at certain stages.
* **Transfer**
* Of course, some errors may be due to ‘transfer’ (also called ‘crosslinguistic influence’). **Transfer** means using sounds, expressions or structures from the first language when performing in the second language . If the L1 and L2 have similar features, then the learner may be able to benefit from the **positive transfer** of L1 knowledge to the L2. On the other hand, transferring an L1 feature that is really different from the L2 results in **negative transfer** and it may make the L2 expression difficult to understand.
* **Interlanguage**
* On close inspection, the language produced by second language learners contains a large number of ‘errors’ that seem to have no connection to the forms of either the first language or second language. Evidence of this sort suggests that there is some in-between system used in the second language acquisition process that certainly contains aspects of the first language and second language, but which is an inherently variable system with rules of its own. This system is called an **interlanguage** and it is now considered to be the basis of all second language production.

**Fossilization** is the process whereby an interlanguage, containing many non-second language features, stops developing toward more accurate forms of the second language

* **Motivation**
* Many learners have an **instrumental motivation**.That is, they want to learn the second language in order to achieve some other goal, such as completing a school graduation requirement or being able to read scientific publications, but not really for any social purposes. In contrast, those learners with an **integrative motivation** want to learn the L2 for social purposes, in order to take part in the social life of a community using that language and to become an accepted member of that community.

It is also worth noting that those who experience some success in second language communication are among the most motivated to learn. So, motivation may be as much a result of success as a cause.

* **Input and output**
* The term **input** is used to describe the language that the learner is exposed to. To be beneficial for L2 learning, that input has to be comprehensible. It can be made comprehensible by being simpler in structure and vocabulary, as in the variety of speech called **foreigner talk**.
* As the learner’s interlanguage develops, however, there is a need for more interaction and the kind of ‘negotiated input’ that arises in conversation.
* **Negotiated input** is second language material that the learner can acquire in interaction through requests for clarification while active attention is being focused on what is said.
* The opportunity
* to produce comprehensible **output** in meaningful interaction seems to be another important element in the learner’s development of L2 ability, yet it is one of the most difficult things to provide in large L2 classes.
* **Communicative competence**
* **Communicative competence** can be defined as the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly. The first component is **grammatical competence**, which involves the accurate use of words and structures. The ability to use appropriate language is the second component, called **sociolinguistic competence**. It enables the learner to know when to say *Can I have some water?* versus *Give me some water!* according to the social context.

The third component is called **strategic competence**. This is the ability toorganize a message effectively and to compensate, via strategies, for any difficulties. In L2 use, learners inevitably experience moments when there is a gap between communicative intent and their ability to express that intent. Some learners may just stop talking, whereas others will try to express themselves using a **communication strategy**. In essence, strategic competence is the ability to overcome potential communication problems in interaction.

* **Applied linguistics**
* In attempting to investigate the complex nature of L2 learning, we have to appeal to ideas not only from linguistic analysis, but from other fields such as communication studies, education, psychology and sociology. This large-scale attempt is often described as **applied linguistics**. **Applied** **linguistics** is the study of a large range of practical issues involving language in general and second language learning in particular.