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### **Lecture three: Second Language Acquisition**

In early childhood, any normal child begins acquiring a language which is named as “L1”. The latter refers to one’s own mother tongue which requires neither formal instruction or schooling, nor conscious effort. Common terms referring to L1 include: mother tongue, mother language, first language. From that time onwards, an L2 might be acquired but with relatively conscious effort in comparison to L1. L2 can also be referred to as second language, foreign language or target language. Although these terms have dissimilarities, still they might be used interchangeably in this context.

#### **Definition of Second Language Acquisition**

Second language acquisition refers to the area of knowledge that concerns itself with the study of the process through which a language that is not one’s own mother tongue is acquired. In this vein, Gass and Selinker (2008: 1-2) claim that:

It is the study of how second languages are learned. In other words, it is the study of the acquisition of a non-primary language; that is, the acquisition of a language beyond the native language. It is the study of how learners create a new language system with only limited exposure to a second language. It is the study of what is learned of a second language and what is not learned; it is the study of why most second language learners do not achieve the same degree of knowledge and proficiency in a second language as they do in their native language; it is also the study of why only some learners appear to achieve native-like proficiency in more than one language. Additionally, second language acquisition is concerned with the nature of the hypotheses (whether conscious or unconscious) that learners come up with regarding the rules of the second language. Are the rules like those of the native language? Are they like the rules of the language being learned? Are there new rules, like neither language, being formed? Are there patterns

that are common to all learners regardless of the native language and regardless of the language being learned? Do the rules created by second language learners vary according to the context of use? Do these rules and patterns vary more in individuals in a second language than they vary in the native language?

To sum up with, the term SLA encompasses the domain that deals with the learning of a non-native language after the acquisition of a native language. The term non-native language might refer to a second, third, or even fourth language. It can either be learned in its native environment; for instance, an Algerian student learning English in England or in the US which is a native environment of English or a non-native environment. For example, an Algerian student, whose mother tongue is Arabic, learns the English language in Algeria where English is a foreign language being learnt in a non-native environment.

### **Early Approaches to SLA**

Several approaches to the study of SLA have been heavily influenced by the field of linguistics since the middle of the twentieth century. These approaches begin with Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage, Morpheme Order Studies, and the Monitor Model.

### **Monitor Model**

One of the early approaches to SLA which has an internal focus is the Monitor Model, proposed by Stephen Krashen (1978). It explicitly and essentially adopts the notion of a language acquisition device, which is a metaphor Chomsky used for children's innate knowledge of language.

Krashen's approach is a collection of five hypotheses which constitute major claims and assumptions about how the L2 code is acquired. The hypotheses forming the model are the following:

**Acquisition/learning hypothesis:** according to Krashen, there two independent systems of foreign language performance: "the acquired system" and "the learned system". There is a distinction to be made between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is subconscious, and involves the innate language acquisition device which accounts for children's L1. Learning is conscious and is exemplified by the L2 learning which takes place in many classroom contexts. Krashen maintained that "learning involved consciously putting into memory vocabulary and grammar, whereas acquisition was the subconscious "picking up" of an L2." cited in Salkind (2008: 346)

**Monitor Hypothesis:** what is learned is available only as monitor, for purposes of editing or making changes in what has already been produced.

**Natural Order Hypothesis:** we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order.

**Input Hypothesis:** Language acquisition takes place because there is comprehensible input. If input is understood, and if there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. Krashen argued that "L2 acquisition depended on exposing the learner to comprehensible input—that is, language that the learner could understand with the use of contextual clues. He suggested that the input should be at a level just slightly higher than the learner's own proficiency" cited in Salkind (2008: 346)

**Affective Filter Hypothesis:** input may not be processed if the affective filter is "up" (eg learning in a relaxed atmosphere leads to "low" affective filter hence learners increase their intake")

In spite of being severely criticised by researchers, Krashen's Model had a major influence on language teaching in the USA in the 1980 and 1990.

### **Reference list**

Gass, S.M. & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*. NY: Taylor & Francis.

Salkind, N.J. (2008). *Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc

Saville-Troike, M. (2006). *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP