

Abstract In an attempt to understand and explain first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition scholars have put forward many theories. In settings where the L2 is an official language (such as in India), the reference group may be educated users of the L2 in the learner's own country rather than a native speaker. Therefore, McLaughlin (1987) argues that "Krashen's claim that an invariant natural order is always found is simply not true" (p. 33). The above arguments show that there seems to exist an order of acquisition in both first and second language acquisition. Hence, one should be careful not to claim for an invariant order of acquisition but for a more flexible order of acquisition and be aware of the variations affecting this order.

### 2.3 Linguistic Universals and Markedness

There are two approaches to linguistic universals. The first approach was put forward by Greenberg (1966, in Ellis 1994) and termed typological universals. Typological universals are based on cross-linguistic comparisons on a wide range of languages drawn from different language families to discover which features they have in common (e.g. all languages have nouns, verbs etc.). The second approach is the generative school represented by Chomsky. The aim is to study individual languages in great depth in order to identify the principles of grammar which underlie and govern specific rules. This approach was later termed as Universal Grammar (Ellis, 1994). The most relevant aspect of both approaches that relates to L1 and L2 acquisition is that some features in a language are marked and some are unmarked. According to typological universals, unmarked features are those that are universal or present in most languages and which the learners tend to transfer. Marked rules are language specific features which the learner resists transferring. According to Universal Grammar, core rules, such as word order, are innate and can be 156 English Language Teaching June, 2009 arrived at through the application of general, abstract principles of language structure. Peripheral rules are rules that are not governed by universal principles. Peripheral elements are those that are derived from the history of the language, that have been borrowed from other languages, or that have arisen accidentally. These elements are marked. Peripheral aspects are more difficult to learn (Ellis, 1994; McLaughlin, 1987). Even though neither of these approaches aimed at explaining first or second language acquisition, the results of both are applicable. The findings show that unmarked features are learned earlier and easier than marked rules in both the first and the second language while unmarked forms require more time and effort by the learner.

### 2.4 Input

Input is defined as "language which a learner hears or receives and from which he or she can learn" (Richards et al., 1989, p. 143) and its importance is widely accepted. The possible causes for fossilization are suggested to be age (learners' brains lose plasticity at a critical age, therefore, certain linguistic features cannot be mastered), lack of desire to articulate (learners' make no effort to adopt target language norms because of various social and psychological factors), communicative pressure (the learner is pressured to communicate ideas above his/her linguistic competence), lack of learning opportunity, and the nature of the feedback on learners' use of L2 (positive cognitive feedback leads to fossilization while negative feedback helps avoid fossilization) (Ellis, 1994; McLaughlin, 1987). Steinberg (1997) explains lateralization as follows, "the brain assigns, as it were, certain structures and functions to certain hemispheres of the brain. Language, logical and analytical operations, and higher mathematics, for example, generally occur in the left hemisphere of the brain, while the right hemisphere is superior at recognizing emotions, recognizing faces and taking in the

structures of things globally without analysis. This separation of structure and function in the hemispheres is technically referred to as lateralization". Furthermore, McLaughlin (1987) claims that evidence from research shows that the learner's first language has an effect on acquisitional sequences which either slows their development or modifies it. He adds that, considerable individual variation in how learners acquire a second language, such as different learning, performance, and communication strategies, obscure the acquisitional sequences for certain constructions. Krashen (1982) suggests that these expressions can have the form of routines (whole utterances learned as memorized chunks – e.g. I don't know.), patterns (partially unanalyzed utterances with one or more slots – e.g. Can I have a \_\_\_\_\_?), and Ellis (1994) suggests that these expressions can consist of entire scripts such as greetings.

### 3.4 Social Factors

Ellis (1994) differentiates between two social contexts in second language learning and outlines them as follows:

- Natural Contexts** Second language learning in majority language contexts: the target language serves as the native language and the language learner is a member of an ethnic minority group (e.g. Turkish workers in Germany). Vygotsky (1982, cited in Daniels, 1996, p. 171–172) explains the ZPD as follows: "The child is able to copy a series of actions which surpass his or her own capacities, but only within limits. By means of copying, the child is able to perform much better when together with and guided by adults than when left alone, and can do so with understanding and independently. The difference between the level of solved tasks that can be performed with adult guidance and help and the level of independently solved tasks is the zone of proximal development."
- Second language learning in international contexts:** the second language is used for interpersonal communication in countries where it is neither learnt as a mother tongue nor used as an official language (e.g. in arts, science, academic, etc.)
- Educational Contexts Segregation:** the second language is taught to learners in a separate context from the native speakers of the target language. Similarly, intersectional modifications which take place in the conversations between native and non-native speakers are seen as necessary to make input comprehensible for the second language learner (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 1994).

### Differences in First and Second Language Acquisition

#### 3.1 The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) claims that there are two ways for an adult to approach a second language: "adults can (1) 'acquire,' which is the way children 'get' their first language, subconsciously, through informal, implicit learning. Once you have acquired something you're not always aware you have done it. It just feels natural; it feels as if it has always been there. Quite distinct from acquisition is (2) conscious learning. This is knowing about language, explicit, formal linguistic knowledge of the language." Cognitively, this lateralization enables the person to reach the capability of abstraction, of formal thinking, and of direct perception which start from puberty on. This shows that adults possess superior cognitive capacity due to left hemisphere dominance.

**Formulaic speech** is defined as expressions which are learnt as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions (Lyons, 1968, cited in Ellis, 1994).

**Structural simplifications** take the form of omitting grammatical functors (e.g. articles, auxiliary verbs) and **semantic simplifications** take the form of omitting content words (e.g. nouns, verbs).

**Morpheme studies** aimed to investigate the acquisition of grammatical functions such as articles or inflectional features such as the plural –s. Chomsky (see Ellis, 1994; McLaughlin, 1991) argues that input is essential but that input alone cannot explain first language acquisition because it contains

ungrammaticalities and disfluencies which make it an inadequate source of information for language acquisition. Wells (1986b, in Ellis, 1994) proposes inter-learner variables affecting the order of acquisition as sex, intelligence, social background, rate of learning, and experience of linguistic interaction. The teacher's most important classroom work "is to provide for the social interaction within the community of learners such that the learners may move from what they know to what they don't yet know" (Hawkins, 2001, p. 375). The ZPD also asserts that "what one can do today with assistance is indicative of what one will be able to do independently in the future" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p. 210).

**Affective Considerations:** Although the affective domain includes many factors such as inhibition, attitudes, anxiety, and motivation, this paper will examine only the first two. Selinker (1969, cited in McLaughlin, 1987) defines Interlanguage as the interim grammars constructed by second language learners on their way to the target language. Rod Ellis (1984) covers the idea of developmental sequences in detail and outlines three developmental stages: the silent period, formulaic speech, and structural and semantic simplification.

2. No. 2 English Language Teaching argues that it builds competence in the learner via listening, Gibbons (1985, cited in Ellis, 1994) argues that it is a stage of incomprehension. The Interactionist Approach to first language acquisition holds that one to one interaction gives the child access to language which is adjusted to his or her level of comprehension, therefore, interaction is seen as crucial and impersonal sources of language (such as TV and radio) are seen as insufficient. Yet, he suggests that acquisition may occur in the classroom when communication is emphasized through dialogues, role playing, and other meaningful interaction. According to Brown, there is a common – invariant – sequence of acquisition for at least 14 function words in English as a first language – noun and verb inflections, prepositions, and articles. Considering language education, instruction creates the zone of proximal development, stimulating a series of inner developmental processes (Daniels, 1996; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). The ZPD concept can aid educators to understand aspects of students emerging capacities that are in early stages of maturation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Young children are not cognitively enough developed to possess attitudes towards races, cultures, ethnic groups, and languages. He argues that affective variables can act as a mental block, also termed affective filter, and prevent comprehensible input to be absorbed. Results from these comparisons and contrasts have valuable implications for language teachers which can help them to design their syllabuses, teaching processes and classroom activities.

Interlanguage is the learner's developing second language knowledge and has some characteristics of the learner's native language, of the second language, and some characteristics which seem to be very general and tend to occur in all or most Interlanguages.

### Similarities between First and Second Language Acquisition

#### 2.1 Developmental Sequences

Researchers have carried out numerous studies to understand the nature of first and second language acquisition. Research in natural settings where unplanned language, such as the learner language that results from attempts by learners to express meaning more or less spontaneously, is used to show that both first and second language learners pass through a similar initial stage, the silent period. Findings of these studies pointed out that there is a definite order in the acquisition of morphemes in English first language learners. Thus far it seems as if L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition follow similar routes, however, other morpheme studies have shown that not all first language learners follow the order

of acquisition predicted. In order to obtain favorable habits the language learner must be given feedback, which constitutes the input. Interactionist views of language acquisition also hold that verbal interaction, or input, is crucial for language acquisition. Consequently, verbal interaction is seen to be crucial for language learning since it helps to make the facts of the second language salient to the learner. The Behavioristic Approach holds that language acquisition is environmentally determined, that the environment provides the language learner with language, which acts as a stimulus, to which the language learner responds. A tentative answer to this question is that the dominance of the left hemisphere leads the adult to tend to overanalyze and to be too intellectually centered on the task of second language learning (Brown, 1994).

**Psychomotor Consideration:** These considerations try to explain the reason why adult second language learners cannot obtain native-like pronunciation in the second language. The decline of the flexibility in the speech muscles, however, prevents adult second language learners to reach native-like pronunciation in the second language (Brown, 1994). While anxiety and motivation are mainly related to adult second language learning, child first language learners have not developed or are just in the process of developing such affective factors. As the child matures it develops a sense of self-identity and towards puberty it acquires the feeling to protect this self-identity and develop inhibitions which are heightened during puberty. The arguments of the critical period are mainly based on pronunciation, neglecting grammatical and semantic competence. Schuman (1986, cited in McLaughlin, 1987; Ellis, 1994) has put forward the Acculturation Theory to account for second language acquisition development in natural settings. Many characteristics of L2 acquisition were highlighted by studies conducted on the issue of Interlanguage. However, learners do not only show a pattern in developmental sequences, but also in the order in which they acquire certain grammatical morphemes. Krashen argues that the input a first language learner receives is simple and comprehensible at the beginning and is getting slightly more complicated. He argues that the second language learner should be exposed to the target language as much as possible and that the lack of comprehensible input will cause the language learner to be held up in his development (Ellis, 1994; McLaughlin, 1987). Therefore, he points out that the child must be equipped with knowledge that enables the learners to overcome the deficiencies of the input. Later, Universal Grammar researchers have drawn implications to second language acquisition from these arguments. However, if the learner responds inappropriately then the behavior is punished and the likelihood of this behavior to occur is decreased (Brown, 1994). Scovel suggests that the plasticity of the brain before puberty enables first and second language acquisition to take place easily. He argues that lateralization makes it difficult for people to be able ever again to easily acquire fluent control of the second language or native-like pronunciation. Scientists argue that the flexibility of children's speech muscles is the reason for why they can easily acquire native-like pronunciation both in the first and in the second language. While inhibitions pose no difficulty for children acquiring their first or second language, they propose to be intervening in adult second language acquisition. Stephen Krashen has developed The Affective Filter Hypothesis to account for the effects of affective variables on second language acquisition. He adds that children are at an advantage when learning a first or second language because their affective filter is low while adults are likely to have a higher affective filter due to events that occurred in adolescence (Krashen, 1982;

McLaughlin, 1987). Mother tongue maintenance: learners of minority groups are either given classes in their mother tongue or they are educated through the medium of their mother tongue. Furthermore, input underdetermines linguistic competence. 157 Vol. 159 Vol. 2.3.