Psycholinguistics

Master 1 DID

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Second Language Acquisition (Part 1)

Language Balance:

 Several studies have investigated executive functioning performance in L2 learners or sequential bilingual children. Studies that have compared L2 learners, monolinguals, and sometimes also early bilinguals have assumed that differences between the groups could be attributed to differences in exposure and proficiency; those who are most exposed to the L2 are likely to have greater proficiency in that language and more practice in monitoring two languages at the same time, which in turn enhances their performance on executive functioning measures.

 However, the second language will always activate first language associations, no matter what level of proficiency the person has. Even if teachers avoid and forbid the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, the connection and links between both languages will always exist in the learners’ minds. In the early stages of second language acquisition, learners process the new language, making connections with their mother tongue. According to (Horst et al. 2010) the links between both languages can make learning contexts even richer.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition:

 It is important for teachers to understand and take into account the second language acquisition stages. According to Krashen (2003) learning and acquiring a second language goes through three stages:

* **PreProduction Stage:** is the first stage, it is a silent period where language learners may have up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary, but they are not yet speaking. Teachers might use visual aids and constant repetition in order to help the students understand. During this first stage, it is very important for teachers to use the environment – such as visual aids – and body language to help students understand. In fact, if students only have limited receptive language, teachers need to ensure their understanding based on the use of the environment. Students acquire second language by repetition, thus it is vital for teachers to use constant repetition in order for students to understand it and, therefore, use it.
* **Early Production Stage:** it is the second stage where children are expected to produce basic sentences using simple vocabulary.
* **The Final Stage:** (Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency and Advanced Fluency) in this stage, children are able to communicate using more complex vocabulary, and are able to understand more complex conversations, thus, becoming fluent.

Krashen’s Hypotheses:

 Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition consists of five Hypotheses:

* **The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis:** According to Krashen, there are two ways of developing language ability.  Acquisition involves the subconscious acceptance of knowledge where information is stored in the brain through the use of communication; this is the process used for developing native languages.  Learning, on the other hand, is the conscious acceptance of knowledge ‘about’ a language (i.e. the grammar or form). Krashen states that this is often the product of formal language instruction.
* **The Monitor Hypothesis:** This hypothesis further explains how acquisition and learning are used; the acquisition system, initiates an utterance and the learning system ‘monitors’ the utterance to inspect and correct errors.  Krashen states that monitoring can make some contribution to the accuracy of an utterance but its use should be limited.  He suggests that the ‘monitor’ can sometimes act as a barrier as it forces the learner to slow down and focus more on accuracy as opposed to fluency.
* **The Natural Order Hypothesis:** According to Krashen, learners acquire parts of language in a predictable order.  For any given language, certain grammatical structures are acquired early while others are acquired later in the process.  This hypothesis suggests that this natural order of acquisition occurs independently of deliberate teaching and therefore teachers cannot change the order of a grammatical teaching sequence.
* **The Input Hypothesis:** This hypothesis suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand, a concept also known as comprehensible input.  However, Krashen also suggests that this comprehensible input should be one step beyond the learner’s current language ability, represented as *i* + 1, in order to allow learners to continue to progress with their language development.
* **The Effective Filter Hypothesis:** According to Krashen one obstacle that manifests itself during language acquisition is the affective filter; that is a 'screen' that is influenced by emotional variables that can prevent learning.  This hypothetical filter does not impact acquisition directly but rather prevents input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain.  According to Krashen the affective filter can be prompted by many different variables including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation and stress.