

Philosophy of language & Second Language Acquisition

Before beginning this paper, it should be noted and taken into consideration the closeness and intertwined characteristics of Second Language Acquisition and Language itself. This paper was written from the perspective of them being one concept. The concepts touched in either section are not separate or isolated ideas/factors, but rather that they directly affect and play into each other. SLA and language share a symbiotic relationship. If a “(#)” is present it is linking the idea to the continuation in the other section.

Second Language Acquisition

The most important factors that drive language acquisition in a learner are context and motivation.

These two factors (context and motivation) will determine the degree to which a language is acquired.

Context

For the purpose of this paper the context will also be defined as a classroom. What is a classroom? It is most certainly not four walls. The classroom is individualized to each learner and tailored to their needs (based out of motivation). However, it should be noted that the teacher (which could also simultaneously be the learner) gives the tools and contexts that the student utilizes in their learning process. The classroom is largely characterized by the input given/accessible to the learner. This (alongside methods implemented) largely creates the context of language acquisition for the learner.

The classroom should be considered the environment where the learning takes place for the learner. This could vary greatly amongst different language learners due to the large variety of who the learners are. Traditionally the learning classroom has been defined as a school or some sort of institution. However, a classroom in all reality travels with the learner as they move through environments with learning opportunities. Typically, acquisition is more effective takes place when the learner is repeatedly exposed to learning opportunities and environments that is meaningful for them. This creates the learner's classroom.

When it comes to teaching, what a teacher is essentially giving to students (especially the language-oriented subjects such as but not limited to English, any foreign language, or ESL) is a new identity. Each identity has its own unique perspective to view and understand the world around them. This is crucial to remember as the teacher is responsible for creating the context in which language is presented, formed, discussed, practiced, and processed. This will be discussed in more detail in the philosophy of language section.⁽¹⁾

The learner obtains a second identity. While acquiring a second language the learner is becoming bilingual (hopefully biliterate and bicultural) but also bi-identical. This typically entails a second personality with different mannerisms and social norms due to the new language, new social groups, and (normally) new culture(s). This is not to be confused with bipolarism or multiple personalities. Having multiple identities gives the learner a second access point to the social realm of language interaction. This paves the way for the learner to develop

crucial social networks and connections with the language communities, which will influence their motivation and context for further language acquisition.

The context of the linguistic awareness of the learner and the nearness of the L1 are determinate of the ease and amount of effort the learner has to implement to acquire a specific second language. For example, if a learner's L1 is English, they would typically have an easier experience acquiring Spanish than they would Chinese. This is due to several factors, but primarily their background linguistic L1 knowledge would assist with more shared language components between the L1 and L2. This is reflected in contrastive analysis. This holds true especially based on the richness of context and level of motivation of the learner.

Motivation and context go hand in hand. The context in which an individual finds themselves determines what is important to their motivation. If the learner has a classroom that is enjoyable and free of inhibitions (i.e. the drunk classroom* as discussed throughout our class) language acquisition will have a much lower barrier to pass. The effective filter regulates this aspect of language acquisition. If a learner is motivated, they will seek out opportunities to surround themselves with learning opportunities to enrich their classroom. This will create situations that contain appropriate contexts that will address and suit the learner's needs. A motivated learner with context for language is the most effective state for acquisition to take place.

Motivation

Motivation is not necessarily inherent. A learner needs to want to be a part of the social community. This is an important pillar of motivation. Wanting to be a part of a social community is so powerful for motivation. This can be seen through learning and understanding culture. Culture embodies the social communities in which the language is in an observable state.⁽³⁾ A learner who is immersing themselves in the culture will have opportunities to observe language taking place and furthering their need to acquire language.

Motivation can be passive motivation. This could take place when a family moves to a new community with different languages present which requires that the learner acquires languages. This promotes the needs of the learner to learn it to "fit in" socially with the new society he's in. This will serve as motivation as the learner will not be able to fully participate with the social community. Language is social⁽²⁾ and humans are required by society to be social for the survival of humanity (especially in a global contexts we have in the modern world). Not being able to participate would motivate the learner intrinsically to acquire language skills to better fulfill their social needs in the community.

The motivation to acquire language that comes from external sources such as people is extrinsic. This could include things such as the learner wants to date someone who is a member of a different speech community. The learner wants to acquire different language skills to form relationships with new speech communities and be able to communicate with them.

Motivation can be active in the learner. This is where the learner takes ownership for pushing themselves to learn a language. They might find reasons that necessitate learning to better their own position or power in a society. For example, a business man sees new potential markets that could make him very profitable. However, the business man lacks the language skills and seeks out opportunities to acquire new language to make contact with other

communities more effective. This learner is taking a very active role in their language acquisition.

Motivation can take place intrinsically, meaning that it comes from within. This would be if a learner feels good and seeks out the benefits due to them gaining pleasure or achievement from increased linguistic knowledge and language skills. This would allow them satisfaction of knowing that they are a member of a second speech community and could motivate them to continue to pursue second language acquisition for more interesting opportunities.

A learner should be aware of healthy habits and choices while acquiring a second language. It is important to be intentional about these choices because it directly affects a learner's level of motivation. Pacing motivation will help prevent burnout. However, in a passive learning situation there might not be room for pacing and this could put stress on learners who are not acquiring a language by choice. This will either put extra stress on the learner or it would create negative associations with a language, which could negate acquisition to its fullest potential. When a learner loves to learn the language (and culture) for it to be most effective. If a learner does not love the language or culture, they might easily lack the motivation to continue acquiring language appropriately or efficiently.

There are many different ways to acquire language. People prefer acquiring in different ways. A learner should find what suits themselves and their needs/wants to be efficient with the acquisition process. If a learner is acquiring language in a way that they find to be meticulous and annoying, it is not going to yield positive results. The learner should keep a focus of it being enjoyable and tailored to themselves as a learner. Second language acquisition does not have to be forced for a learner to have motivation.

Different styles and methods of acquisition may be more appropriate, effective, and engaging for learners at different stages of acquisition. A learner should select methods and strategies that suit their current needs and abilities with the language to be most efficient. When a learner finds success, they will feel more motivated from that sense of achievement. Learners will typically go and search for more opportunities to take risks with language and gain that sense of achievement. Basically, learners need a safe environment to fail in order to gain confidence and motivation with acquiring language. This is reflected in the concept of zone of proximal development.

Miscellaneous SLA Concepts

The critical theory hypothesis might reflect certain developmental milestones in a learner's life, but is not an end all be all with respects to language acquisition. There are developmental marks in a person's life, but the learner (especially if they are aware) has the ability to continue learning language beyond those "critical age stages". A learner is not prevented from achieving native like language abilities even after starting with new languages past the critical points. I believe this is applied to all aspects of language, including the phonetics of a language. Explicit instruction and intentional practice can overcome these assumptions of language acquisition.

Alongside the critical hypothesis the concept of fossilization holds true, but only to a certain extent. If the learner has met their needs and they do not find reason for expending extra effort to perfecting the details of their L2, fossilization may take place. Fossilization is always an option, but it serves more as an indicator to what extent or level a language is required by the social groups that with which a learner participates. It is always possible (with enough explicit

instruction and intentional practice) to achieve competency and delete the fossilized language from a learner's L2. Even after years of fossilization, if the social groups and communities necessitate that the language changes, then the learner can change and evolve their L2 to meet the current needs.

Grades can be detrimental to language learning, (but not always). It either demotivates the learner ("I'm just doing it for the grade or honors diploma") or gives them a false perception of their knowledge/ability with a language. That will promote an over extended sense of confidence. Grades do not have beneficial spaces with a language acquisition process other than to label (evaluate) and give a (false) sense of achievement. Achievement is a feeling that a learner decides is important. This is at the individual level and the value of grades should mean nothing to the teacher (other than to plan help guide/plan instruction), but rather the value and meaning of grades are for the student to decide. Evaluation is necessary and useful, but assigning the traditional grades might not always help learners to stay motivated to acquire language. If anything, traditional grades add barriers to the acquisition process such as anxiety in students.

Mastery should be defined as the ability to use language to the degree that the learner no longer has inhibitions communicating their way through particular social situations. Now, this should be very subjective and to the discretion and parameters that the learner sets. Mastery does have a second aspect, the audience. Those who are reading or listening to the L2 language also have input to the degree of master of language being spoken. This can come from both native and nonnative speakers/writers. They are also (socially) allowed to make statements and judgments based on the L2 language produced.

An analogy that might help illustrate the concept of second language acquisition is learning language is a journey or a quest, that is life long and it is searching for this mystical thing called fluency. Learning a language will never end, even for the L1. There is simply too much to be acquired and too many specific contexts/situations for language to be used in that would yield a "fluent speaker". However, it is possible to achieve some level of mastery, but that is subjective and depends on the speaker's and listener(s) definition of mastery.

Philosophy of language

First and foremost, language is identity.

During this conversation the term "speaker" will encompass an individual who has the ability to tap into the four main channels of a language (speaking, listening, writing, and reading).

The identity of a speaker is instilled by the language they have. This is their language identity. It is what an individual uses to learn literally everything around them. It is a filter for life and reality. Language regulates how an individual perceive and process concepts in the world around them. Every aspect of language affects the speaker's identity from every phenetic sound to the complex social discourses. The lexicon and syntax provide your perception and your frame of thought/feelings. The list could go on and on for how language instills identity and reality to a speaker/individual.

This⁽¹⁾ could be thought of as a new pair of glasses (or an apparatus of sorts) that coats the learner's(s') senses with new lens to feel and explore their environment. This includes to

what extent we as humans are allowed to perceive the world and what the world may possibly exist of (abstractly and concretely speaking). This could expand a learner's limitations for what reality consists of. For example, this could add new colors to their knowledge or ways to perceive directional (with new prepositions) or ways to describe feelings or time. The list could go on forever. New languages to the learner are new universes.

Language⁽³⁾ can be observed through different states and phenomena. One of the most common and natural forms is the spoken form. Speech is a primary place where we can see language taking place. It is invisible to the naked eye, but the effects of language can clearly be seen. This confirms that language is real and that it is tangible. Tangible in the sense that we can encounter and interact with it (not necessarily with our hands, but with our bodies and emotions). Language creates and can make things happen just as if a carpenter were building a shelf. Every time a speaker shares his thoughts and identity when socializing it comes through the filter of language. Language exists in the physical world. Language is real. Language is identity.

Fluency is a myth. There is no such degree of a person who is able to consider themselves fluent with a language, including their L1. Fluency would encompass perfection (which also is extremely subjective and unobtainable because it does not exist) which impossible to navigate in a social context. There are countless situations where an individual's level of a language would be insufficient to completely understand concepts or respond appropriately to the fullest extent of other speakers in the discourse. No one is fluent.

Language is embodied by social interaction. Language is social⁽²⁾. At its core this is the primary purpose of language, to interact and communicate with those around the speaker. Social linguistics plays a huge role in the identity of a speaker. These speakers act and react differently in different social situations based on several factors such as the backgrounds of the members in the social situation, emotions, objectives/goals/purpose of communication, etc. Socio economics plays big role in the identity of a person, which is reflected upon in the language use, formality, and style. These are only but a few of the factors that directly affects the observable language use. Academic language attempts to remove these types of factors from the language and create an untouched version of the speaker's voice.

There is no correct way to use language, however there are consequences (good or bad) within social situations that stem from different styles and discourses. Social repercussions of using language "correctly" (typically from the perspective of the audience), is seen as important in a society. This is standardized in a culture, and it creates social norms for the social groups in a culture. However, if language is perceived to have been used incorrectly (which includes too "correctly" aka hyper creativeness) there may be negative reactions or confusion. This will create social barriers and the identities of the speakers may not collaborate well. Again, it should be noted that there is no correctness about language, just misconceptions about what is to be expected.

Multilingual people and codeswitching are a norm and beneficial for society. As known, many speakers in the world are multilingual. Society should welcome multilingualism and promote it amongst its citizens. Multilingualism creates social connections and an understanding of fostering a more globalized community. There are countless benefits associated with multilingualism, but one of the most important is an understand for each other (which honestly is what this world needs).

Owning a language (or language exploration) is a powerful tactic, which closely coincides with second language acquisition. It is rooted in the ideas of the self-exploration and

identity. When language is made available for learners to explore and understand through experience (with appropriate context and motivation) it is very meaningful and personal for the learner. This will instill the language within them and fuse it to their identity. This is the process of a learner taking the language and making it theirs. They do not merely use language, the speaker owns language, it is part of them and their identity.

This paper has touched upon the main ideas and concepts of my philosophy of language. However, there are a few other concepts that if given the space, would be helpful to expand upon: Attentiveness regulates the ability to engage with the language effectively, the learners being invested and aware that learning is taking place, language used in an academic context, what is valued in a classroom and creates academically successful students with regard to language.