

Lecture 1 THE SUBJECT OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The plan:

The study of second language acquisition

T&P of TFL as a Science. Socio-Historical Factors in the Development of M of TFL. Links of FLT Methodology with other Sciences.

The main methodological categories.

What is the scope of SLA?

What does the study of SLA consist of?

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.

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.

By principles we understand the guidelines which being realized in the content of teaching, organization, methods and devices of teaching, and determine the strategy and tactics of teaching.

We have been traditionally using didactic (дидактические) and methodical (методические) principles which in the present day situation cannot fully suit the modern aims of FLE (cognitive, pragmatic and pedagogical aspects), and the process of intercultural FL education which has become different due to many factors.

The didactic principles do not fully explain the process of teaching intercultural communication. That is why new innovative principles have been introduced: the principle of integrativeness, discourse, problemacity, authenticity, situativeness, pragmatic-orientation and othyer. So we should distinguish between: Methodological and Methodical principles

The set of methodological principles which reflect the essence of FLE methodology includes the following principles: cognitive, communicative, linguacultural, socio-cultural person-oriented (or reflexive-developing)

The main (leading) one is cognitive. Why?

Since children are not born speaking, they must learn language. The question then becomes one of what they are born with that is required for this task. Do they come with innate learning mechanisms to get them started? Are such mechanisms general-purpose aids to learning or specific to language alone? What empirical findings could help answer these questions? A related issue is whether children are born with built-in linguistic categories and structures required for learning. Here again, there has been a great deal of debate. Some have proposed that children come with syntactic categories like “noun” or “verb” already wired in, along with certain structural arrays for combining them. The task would then be one of working out what counts as a noun or

verb in the speech children hear. Others have argued that children can discover nouns and verbs by looking at all the linguistic contexts each word occurs in. And still others have argued that they can discover nouns and verbs from the kinds of things they designate – nouns are for people, places, and things; verbs for actions. Even if children are born with a learning mechanism dedicated to language, the main proposals have focussed only on syntactic structure. The rest has to be learnt. In language, children face a particularly intricate task for learning. Compare learning a language to learning how to put on socks and shoes or to brush one's teeth. It is clear that languages demand a lot more. They are highly complex systems whether one considers just the sound system or the vocabulary, or also syntactic constructions and word structure. The structural elements are just half of what has to be learnt; the other half consists of the functions assigned to each element. Learners must master both structure and function to use language. Additionally, second language acquisition is concerned with the nature of the hypotheses (including both 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?

The first area we will discuss will be the central focus of this lecture, second language acquisition theory. As developed today, second language acquisition theory can be viewed as a part of "theoretical linguistics", i.e. it can be studied and developed without regard to practical application.

Over the years, the study of second language acquisition has become inextricably intertwined with language pedagogy. Second language acquisition is not about pedagogy unless the pedagogy affects the course of acquisition.

Most graduate programs whose goal is to train students in language teaching now have required course in second language acquisition. Why should this be the case?

People have come to realize that if one is to develop language-teaching methodologies, there has to be a firm basis for those methodologies in language learning. It would be counterproductive to base language teaching methodologies on something other than an understanding of how language learning does and does not take place.

Languages aren't all cut from the identical pattern, and this makes a difference in acquisition. They differ in the range and combination of sounds they use – for instance, whether they allow only single consonants to begin a syllable (top) or also combinations of consonants (stop, trip); whether they use pure vowels or also diphthongs (combinations of vowels) in syllables (heat vs. height). They differ in how many word-classes they have. Some have nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions (e.g., English and French). Others place "adjectives" in with verbs. Some use prepositions (in the boat), some use postpositions (equivalent to the boat in), and some add special case endings, usually suffixes, directly onto the locative noun (here, boat) to capture the same meaning. Languages also differ in how they indicate who is

doing what to whom. Some use case endings on nouns for this (as in German, Finnish, or Latin), and others word order (as in English or Mandarin).

A nominative case ending and a first-position noun may do the same job in different languages. Languages differ in whether word order serves a grammatical purpose (identifying the subject or object, for instance) or a pragmatic one (identifying information as given or as new). They differ in the meanings that are packaged in words, not only in what they have words for (many kinds of camel, in Somali; many kinds of rice, in Thai; many colors, in most Western European languages) but also in just what meaning-combinations are carried by words (whether verbs of motion include information about manner, as in English walk, run, stroll, trot, meander, or not, as in languages like Spanish or Hebrew that contain fewer such verbs).

Languages differ in how they express causation. They may use a lexical verb like open to mean ‘cause to open’ (he opened the window), rely on an auxiliary verb combined with a lexical verb, as in French faire marcher ‘make walk’ (il fait marcher le chien ‘he makes-walk the dog’ = ‘he walks the dog’), or add an ending to the verb stem itself to make a verb into a causative, as in Turkish or Hindi. Languages differ in their basic word orders for subject, verb, and object. They may favor SVO or SOV, for example. And they display considerable consistency with the orders of other elements too. In SVO languages, adjectives usually follow their nouns (English is an exception here), and in SOV languages like Japanese they precede them. The same holds for prepositions that precede their nouns in an SVO language like English but follow (and are called postpositions) in an SOV language like Japanese. Relative clauses fill the same positions as adjectives: In SVO languages, they generally follow the nouns they modify, and in SOV languages they precede them. The basic word order in a language is correlated with the order of elements in many other constructions of that language (Greenberg 1963; Hawkins 1988)

To give an example, some language-teaching methodologies are based exclusively on rule memorization and translation exercises. That is, a student in a language class is expected to memorize rules and then translate sentences from the native language to the language being learned and vice versa. However, studies in second language acquisition have made language teachers and curriculum designers aware that language learning consists of more than rule memorization. More important, it involves learning to express communicative needs. The details of this new conceptualization of language learning have resulted in methodologies that emphasize communication.

Ø Approaches to Language Teaching

The different teaching approaches can be classified into four theoretical orientations: structural, cognitive, psychological and functional.

Structural approaches believe that language can be reduced to a learnable set of building blocks. There are rules, known as grammar and syntax, that govern how to combine these basic elements. These rules can be memorized to achieve a high level of proficiency in a language.

Some proponents would even go so far as saying that there's a predetermined sequence in which a language should be learned. Grammar textbooks are the most commonly used material in this category.

The cognitive perspective in learning a language puts the learner smack in the center of everything. Cognitive approaches look to answer questions like: How can a language be effectively learned? How does one make a set of vocabulary words memorable and get them embedded in the long-term memory?

According to this kind of approach, the techniques, strategies and even the sequence of lessons are learner-led and can't be predetermined. Learning a language is a conscious, rational, information-processing event.

Ø Psychological: Language learning is seen through issues like learner motivation and predisposition, a location's conduciveness to learning, teacher-student dynamics, stress levels, etc.

Psychological approach is the teacher supportive enough to the students? Is the classroom dynamic facilitating or inhibiting the acquisition of the language?

Many of the insights in this category are borrowed from counseling and social psychology.

Functional/Communicative: Functional approaches often emphasize spoken language over written language, and profess that language isn't a set of grammar rules but rather a tool for communication. This has tremendous implications for the types of activities or the materials employed. Communicative approaches often eschew grammar textbooks in exchange for speaking drills and question-and-answer interactions where students get a feel for what speaking the language in conversation is really like.

Languages are usually consistent both in their basic word order and in the orders favored across a variety of constructions. These statistical universals are important for speaking and listening. The internal consistencies in a language help speakers keep track of what they are listening to and what they are planning to say themselves. They allow predictions about linguistic units and offer predictable frames for the presentation of information. So children need to learn general structural regularities in the language they're acquiring – whether it is an SOV or SVO language, whether relative clauses and adjectives follow or precede the nominals they modify, whether locative phrases are signaled by prepositions or postpositions, and so on.

These properties are important because, once speakers have identified them, they can rely on certain assumptions about the kind of information that can come next in an utterance. Just as languages display consistent structural patterns, they display consistent lexical patterns in the semantic information they bundle together. Some languages combine information about motion and manner of motion, and put information about the path followed elsewhere. The English verb stroll conveys 'move in a leisurely manner', while a preposition like along marks the path taken in, for example, stroll along the bank. Other languages package motion and path together, and put manner elsewhere.

Children must learn how their language packages information at word level. Knowledge of structure and function informs the assumptions speakers make in interpreting what they hear and in choosing how to convey their meaning when they speak. The structures and vocabulary of a language provide choices for speakers. There is no one-to-one mapping of linguistic constructions (and words) to each situation. Instead, speakers must choose how to represent a particular event to someone else. Did Justin chase the dog, or did the dog run away from Justin? Did Sophie come into the house or go into the house? Did Kate teach the children to tie knots, or did the children learn to tie knots from Kate? In each case, the choice of construction and words conveys a particular perspective on the event (Clark 1997). At the same time, the perspectives speakers can take may be limited by what is available in their language.

Discussion questions

1. What are the main factors that influence how quickly and effectively a person acquires a second language?
2. How do age and the critical period hypothesis affect second language learning?
3. In what ways do motivation and attitude impact a learner's success in acquiring a second language?
4. What role does interaction and communication play in the process of second language acquisition?
5. How can teachers apply theories of second language acquisition to improve classroom instruction?