



THEORIES AND MODELS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA) AS SPRINGBOARD IN TEACHING LINGUISTICS RELATED SUBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses different theories and models of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) such as the Monitor Model, Inter language Theories, Universal Grammar Theory, Cognitive Theories, Multidimensional Model, Acculturation /Pidginization Theory and included the topic Discourse Analysis as means to examine language use to further supplement the arguments made and orchestrated by the researchers. The above-mentioned theories and models are therefore strongly suggested to be utilized by English language teachers as springboard in the teaching of content and pedagogical linguistics related subjects in the undergraduate and even in the graduate levels because these models and theories play a vital role in capacitating the language skills of students.

KEYWORDS: Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Linguistics, Universal Grammar theory, Inter language theories, Multidimensional model

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, various views on second language teaching and learning



have sprouted and have been the focus of discussion in academic fora and research. Especially notable is the major shift in perspective which is focused on the development of a more empirical approach to the teaching and learning of a second language (L2) (Nunan, 2010). Because of this, genuine explosion in the number of data-based studies in the field has been remarkably noted. These studies include new ways of addressing concerns and issues by looking critically into the nature of the second language, that is, in this context, English; by investigating closely the learners of English as a second language (ESL); and by exploring significantly the learning process of second language acquisition (SLA).

Further, anyone specifically those that are coming from bilingual and multilingual communities such as the Philippines experience the diversity and dynamism of language. Whatever modifications and/or developments therein, the teacher as well as the students in these classroom settings become a part of the adjustment process. Thus, the knowledge and proficiency of both are challenged.

With the number of issues and concerns confronting the educational landscape particularly the teaching of ESL in the Philippines, this study is geared towards the discussion as well as dissemination of the different models and theories and language to further enrich their existence in the linguistics world.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories were developed along the lines of first language acquisition and second language learning. These theories are used in the process of learning a language. In spite of this language phenomenon, still a number of theories on second language acquisition were formulated. Due to the limitations of these models, not all of them are considered in this study. The said theories and models are presented in the succeeding section.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study made-use of descriptive- qualitative research approach in order to process the data and other pertinent information. This approach seeks to



describe, decode and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. According to Kumar (2011) and Villanueva and Gamiao (2022), descriptive-qualitative design describes and decodes data in order to arrive at an intended meaning and result.

Hence, in this study, the researchers discussed the different models and theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) with hopes of benefitting English language teachers in their teaching pedagogies and their contents.

DISCUSSION OF THE THEORIES AND MODELS

of Second Language Acquisition

The following theories and models of SLA below are thoroughly explored with the aim of utilizing it as a springboard in the teaching of linguistics related disciplines.

Theories/Models of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Monitor model. Stephen Krashen's model is one of the most influential and well-known theories of second language acquisition. In the late 1970s, Krashen developed the Monitor Model, an overall theory of second language acquisition, that had important implications for language teaching. It forwards five central hypotheses:

The acquisition versus learning hypothesis. Acquisition is a subconscious process, much like first language acquisition, while learning is a conscious process resulting into knowing about language. Learning does not turn into acquisition



and it usually takes place in formal environments, while acquisition can take place without learning in informal environments.

The monitor hypothesis. Learning has the function of monitoring and editing the utterances produced through the acquisition process. The use of the Monitor is affected by the amount of time that the second language learner has at his/her disposal to think about the utterance he/she is about to produce, the focus on form, and his/her knowledge of second language rules.

The natural order hypothesis. There is a natural order of acquisition of second language rules. Some of them are early-acquired and some are late-acquired. This order does not necessarily depend on simplicity of form while it could be influenced by classroom instruction. Evidence for the Natural Order Hypothesis was provided by a series of research studies investigating morpheme acquisition orders.

The input hypothesis. According to Krashen, receiving comprehensible input is the only way that can lead to the acquisition of a second language. If a learner's level in a second language is i , he/she can move to an $i+1$ level only by being exposed to comprehensible input containing $i+1$.

The affective filter hypothesis. Comprehensible input will not be fully utilized by the learners if there is a 'mental block', i.e. the affective filter that acts as a barrier to the acquisition process.

Krashen's Monitor Theory is an example of a macro theory attempting to cover most of the factors involved in second language acquisition: age, personality traits, classroom instruction, innate mechanisms of language acquisition, environmental influences, and input but not without limitations. Despite its popularity, the Monitor Theory was criticized by theorists and researchers mainly on the grounds of its definitional adequacy.

Despite the various criticisms, Krashen's Monitor Theory of second language acquisition had a great impact on the way second language learning was viewed, especially with the occurrence of code switching as a language phenomenon among teachers and students.



Interlanguage theories. The term inter language was first used by Selinker and Douglas (1985) to describe the linguistic stage second language learners go through during the process of mastering the target language. Since then, inter language has become a major strand of SLA research and theory.

Learning a second language (L2) is a gradual process from the L1 towards the L2. At every stage of learning learners have rules of grammar which are not perfect yet, and they are not L1 rules (they are something between). In other words, the learner creates a structured system of language at any stage in his development. Each system is gradually revised and as it evolves, the rules become more and more complex.

Whenever one acquires second or another language, one develops a so-called inter language, which is developed by him/her as a system of rules and applications that can either bear the properties and rules of first language and properties of and rules of both first and second language, and can also not possess features of neither.

According to Selinker and Douglas (1985), inter language is a temporary grammar which is systematic and is composed of rules. These rules are the product of five main cognitive processes. The first is *overgeneralization*. Some of the rules of the inter language system may be the result of the overgeneralization of specific rules and features of the target language. The second is *transfer of training*. Some of the components of the inter language system may result from transfer of specific elements via which the learner is taught the second language. The third is *strategies of second language learning*. Some of the rules in the learner's inter language may result from the application of language learning strategies as a tendency on the part of the learners to reduce the TL (target language) to a simpler system (Selinker and Douglas, 1985). The fourth is *strategies of second language communication*. Inter language system rules may also be the result of strategies employed by the learners in their attempt to communicate with native speakers of the target language. The last is *language*



transfer. Some of the rules in the inter language system may be the result of transfer from the learner's first language.

Jean D'Souza (1977) thinks these five processes could be reduced to three. According to him, there is no clear cut distinction between processes three, four, and five. Overgeneralization could include strategies of second language learning and

strategies of second language communication. Besides he pointed out that it is not always possible to say with certainty whether a learner uses a particular form because he thinks it is enough to communicate effectively or because he is using a particular strategy. Therefore, she suggested transfer (from previous learning experience and from errors due to interference); simplification and overgeneralization of elements of the target language system and errors due to learning strategies; and errors arising from teaching methods and materials employed, and 'teaching induced' errors.

Selinker and Douglas (1985) in fact discusses in detail what he means by strategy of second language learning and strategy of second language communication. According to him learner strategies are culture bound to some extent. He gives the example of chanting which is used as a learning device in many traditional cultures. These strategies can be present in the conscious or subconscious level. When a learner realizes that he has no linguistic competence for handling a target language material he evolves some strategies to get through the situation. Whatever strategies he uses considerably affect his surface structure of sentences underlying his inter language utterances (<http://www.hmpenglishonline.com/interlanguage.htm>).

This theory explains the reason why code switching happens in a bilingual and multilingual classroom during the learning of a second language. It gives full understanding of the occurrence of such language phenomenon thus, this theory is utilized as well as discussed in this study.

Universal Grammar theory. This is based on Chomsky's claim that there are certain principles that form the basis on which knowledge of language



develops. These

principles are biologically determined and specialized for language learning (Chomsky, 1986).

Originally, the UG theory did not concern itself with second language learning. It referred to the first language learner. Its principles though were adopted by second language researchers and were applied in the field of second language acquisition. UG was used in order to provide explanations for the existence of developmental sequences in inter language and to support the view of inter language as a natural language which is subject to the constraints of the Universal Grammar. The use of UG for language transfer, fossilization and L2 pedagogy was also suggested. Evidence was provided that adults have some sort of access to knowledge of UG, and this knowledge is used in the development of foreign language competence (Bley-Vroman, Felix, & Ioup, 1988).

A model very similar to Chomsky's Universal Grammar was proposed by Felix (1985). The *Competition Model* consists of two subsystems: the Language-Specific Cognitive System (LSC-system) and the Problem-Solving system (PSC-system) and it is responsible for the differences in the learning processes employed by children and adults. It is argued that the children's learning process is guided by the LSC-system, while adults employ the problem-solving module which then enters into competition with the language-specific system. Even though the LSC-system is governed by principles similar to the principles of the Universal Grammar, the principles of the PSC-system are largely unknown.

Another UG based theory, the Creative Construction theory, was suggested by Dulay and Burt (1974). According to this theory, children engaged in second language

learning progressively reconstruct rules for the target language speech they hear guided by universal innate mechanisms which lead them to construct certain types of hypotheses about the system of the language they are acquiring until the mismatch between what they are exposed to and what they actually produce is



resolved. Empirical evidence from comparing the errors produced by Spanish children learning English with those produced by children learning English as their mother-tongue shows that most of the syntax errors in English produced by the Spanish children are of the same type of errors made by children learning English natively. Also, finding Spanish and Chinese children acquiring English morphemes in similar orders, Dulay and Burt conclude that it is the L2 system rather than the L1 system that guides the acquisition process.

The effect of the mother-tongue in determining the magnitude of the second language learning task is reflected in the model of the learning process that Corder (1978) suggested. According to this model the learner begins his/her learning task from a basic Universal Grammar (or built-in syllabus) which gradually becomes more complex in response to the learner's exposure to target language data and the communicative needs he/she is faced with. This elaboration or complexification process follows a constant sequence for all learners of a particular second language, but the progress of any particular learner is affected by the degree to which his/her knowledge of the target language in the form of mother-tongue-like features facilitates his/her learning process.

The Universal Grammar theories of second language acquisition were generated in order to provide explanations for empirical evidence and they were primarily

concerned with the internal mechanisms that lead to the acquisition of the formal aspects of the target language and the similarities and differences between acquiring a particular language as a first or a second language.

This theory elaborates the peculiar grammar of each language under study. The three languages of the code switch utterances find justification in this model.

Cognitive theories. These provide significant insights into language research. Psychologists and psycholinguists view second language learning as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill. Some of the sub-skills involved in the



language learning process are applying grammatical rules, choosing the appropriate vocabulary, following the pragmatic conventions governing the use of a specific language. The language acquisition theories based on a cognitive view of language development regard language acquisition as the gradual automatization of skills through stages of restructuring and linking new information to old knowledge. In other words, cognitivists maintain that language sub-skills become automatic with practice. During this process of automatization, the learner organizes and restructures new information that is acquired. Through this process of restructuring the learner links new information to old information and achieves increasing degrees of mastery in the second language. This gradual mastering may follow a U-shaped curve sometimes indicating a decline in performance as more complex internal representations replace less complex ones followed by an increase again as skill becomes an expertise (McLaughlin,1990).

From the cognitivist's point of view language acquisition is dependent in both content and developmental sequencing on prior cognitive abilities and language is viewed as a function of more general nonlinguistic abilities (Berman, 1987).

However, the differences between the various cognitive models make it impossible to construct a comprehensive cognitive theory of second language acquisition. Furthermore, Schimdt (1992) disclosed that there is little theoretical support from psychology on the common belief that the development of fluency in a second language is almost exclusively a matter of the increasingly skillful application of rules.

Moreover, evidence against the cognitivist theory is provided by Felix (1981) who describes the general cognitive skills as useless for language development. The only area in which cognitive development is related to language development is vocabulary and meaning, since lexical items and meaning relations are most readily related to a conceptual base.

An offshoot of the cognitive theory is the inter activist approach to second



language learning. The language processing model proposed by the inter activist approach assumes an autonomous linguistic level of processing and contains a general problem solver mechanism (GPS) that allows direct mappings between underlying structure and surface forms, thus short-circuiting the grammatical processor (Clahsen,1987).

The last two theories, the Multidimensional Model and the Acculturation/Pidginization Theory, refer mainly to the acquisition of a second language by adults in naturalistic environments.

Multidimensional model. In this model, the learner's stage of acquisition of the target language is determined by two dimensions: the learner's developmental stage and the learner's social-psychological orientation. The developmental stage is defined by accuracy orders and developmental sequences, but within a stage learners may differ because of their social-psychological orientation, which is independent of developmental stage. Thus, a segregatively oriented learner uses more restrictive simplification strategies than an integratively oriented learner who uses elaborate simplification strategies. The segregative learner is more likely to fossilize at that stage than is the integrative learner who has a more positive attitude towards learning the target language and a better chance of learning the target language well (Clahsen, Meisel, & Pienemann, 1983).

The Multidimensional Model has both explanatory and predictive power in that it not only identifies stages of linguistic development but it also explains why learners go through these developmental stages and it predicts when other grammatical structures will be acquired (Ellis, 1994). Although the Multidimensional Model has made important contributions to second language acquisition research, there are some problems with the "falsify ability" of its predictive framework, such as explaining how it is that learners learn whatever they manage to produce despite the processing constraints. Furthermore, the Multidimensional Model does not explain the process through which learners obtain intake from input and how they use this intake to reconstruct internal



grammars. In this respect the Multidimensional Model is limited

Acculturation/Pidginization theory. According to Schumann (1978), SLA is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language.

From this perspective, second language acquisition is greatly affected by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the target-language culture. Social distance refers to the learner as a member of a social group that is in contact with another social group whose members speak a different language. Psychological distance results from a number of different affective factors that concern the learner as an individual, such as language shock, culture shock, culture stress, etc. If the social and/or psychological distance is great then acculturation is impeded and the learner does not progress beyond the early stages of language acquisition. As a result, his/her target language will stay pidginized. Pidginization is characterized by simplifications and reductions occurring in the learner's inter language which lead to fossilization when the learner's inter language system does not progress in the direction of the target language (McLaughlin, 1987).

Schumann's theory received limited empirical support. One of the criticisms that the acculturation theory received was that social factors are assumed to have a direct impact on second language acquisition while they are more likely to have an indirect one (Ellis, 1994). Also, pidginization is a group phenomenon, while language acquisition is an individual phenomenon. Finally, the acculturation model fails to explain how the social factors influence the quality of contact the learners experience (Gitsaki, 2005).



Discourse Analysis as a Means to Examine Language Use

Wiśniewski (2006) defined discourse analysis as a linguistic study examining the use of language by its native population. Its major concern is investigating language functions along with its forms, produced both orally and in writing. Moreover, identification of linguistic qualities of various genres, vital for their recognition and interpretation, together with cultural and social aspects which support its comprehension, is the domain of discourse analysis. To put it in another way, discourse analysis is the branch of applied linguistics which deals with the examination of discourse attempts to find patterns in communicative products as well as their correlation with the circumstances in which they occur, which are not explainable at the grammatical level (Carter, 1993).

The first modern linguist who commenced the study of relation of sentences and coined the name *discourse analysis*, which afterwards denoted a branch of applied linguistics, was Zellig Harris. Originally, however, it was not to be treated as a separate branch of study - Harris proposed an extension of grammatical examination which reminded of syntactic investigations. In addition, Trappes-Lomax (2004) noted that discourse analysis is a result of not only linguistic research, but also of researchers engaged in other fields of inquiry, particularly sociology, psychology, anthropology and psychotherapy. In the 1960s and 1970s, other scholars who are philosophers of language or those dealing with pragmatics enormously influenced the development of this branch of study as well. Among other contributors to this field are the Prague School of Linguists, whose focus was on the organization of information in communicative products, indicated the connection of grammar and discourse, along with text grammarians (McCarthy, 1991).

Moreover, Cook (1990) said that the range of inquiry of discourse analysis



not only covers linguistic issues, but also with other matters, such as enabling computers to comprehend and produce intelligible texts, thus contributing to progress in the study of Artificial Intelligence. Out of these investigations, a very important concept of schemata emerged. It is defined as prior knowledge of typical situations which enables people to understand the underlying meaning of words in a given text. This mental framework is thought of to be shared by a language community and to be activated by key words or context in order for people to understand the message. To implement schemata to a computer, however, is yet impossible.

According to McCarthy (1991), the examination of oral discourse is mainly the domain of linguists who at first concentrated on the language used during teacher - learner communication afterwards altering their sphere of interest to more general issues. Since the examination of written language is easier to conduct than the scrutiny of oral texts, in that more data is available in different genres ,produced by people from

different backgrounds as well as with disparate purposes, it is more developed and of interest not only to linguists but also to language teachers and literary scholars. What is worth mentioning is the fact that in the analysis, scholars do not evaluate the content in terms of literary qualities, or grammatical appropriateness, but how readers can infer the message that the author intends to convey.

It is obviously possible to find various types and classes of discourse depending on their purpose. Written texts differ from one another not only in genre and function, but also in their structure and form, which is of primary importance to language teachers, since the knowledge of arrangement and variety of writing influences readers' understanding, memory of messages included in the discourse, as well as the speed of perception. Moreover, written texts analysis provides teachers with systematic knowledge of the ways of describing texts (Trappes-Lomax, 2004).

One of the major concerns of discourse analysis is the relation of



neighboring sentences and, in particular, factors attesting to the fact that a given text is more than only the sum of its components. It is only with written language analysis that certain features of communicative products started to be satisfactorily described, despite the fact that they were present also in speech, for instance, the use of *that* to refer to a previous phrase, or clause (McCarthy, 1991).

Links within discourse. Discourses are divided into two groups: *formal* which refers to facts that are present in the analyzed text, and *contextual* which refers to the outside world, the knowledge (or schemata) which is not included in the communicative product itself (Cook, 1990).

By and large, five types of cohesive devices in discourse analysis are distinguished: a) substitution; b) ellipsis; c) reference; d) conjunction; and e) lexical cohesion.

Substitution is done in order to avoid repeating the same word several times in one paragraph it is replaced, most often by *one*, *do* or *so*. *So* and *do* in all its forms might also substitute whole phrases or clauses (e.g. *Tom has created the best web directory. I told you so long time ago.*) The second type of cohesive device is *ellipsis* which is very similar to substitution; however, it replaces a phrase by a gap. In other words, it is the omission of a noun, a verb, or a clause on the assumption that it is understood from the linguistic context. *Reference* is the third type, pertaining to the use of words which do not have meanings of their own, such as pronouns and articles. To infer their meaning, the reader has to refer them to something else that appears in the text (*Tom: How do you like my new Mercedes Vito? - Marry: It is a nice van, which I'm also thinking of buying.*) The fourth is *conjunction*, which specifies the relationship between clauses, or sentences. Most frequent relations of sentences are: addition (*and, moreover* e.g. *Moreover, the chocolate fountains are not just regular fountains, they are more like rivers full of chocolate and sweets.*), temporality (*afterwards, next* e.g. *He bought her perfume at a local perfume shop and afterwards moved toward a jewelry store.*) and causality (*because, since*).



The last type of cohesive device is *lexical cohesion*, which denotes links between words which carry meaning: verbs, nouns, adjectives. Two types of lexical cohesion are differentiated, namely: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration adopts various forms, particularly synonymy, repetition, hyponymy or antonymy. Collocation is the way in which certain words occur together, which is why it is easy to make out what will follow the first item.

From this classification, it is clear that when people produce discourse they focus not only on the correctness of a single sentence, but also on the general outcome of their production. That is why the approach to teaching a foreign language which concentrates on creating grammatically correct sentences, yet does not pay sufficient attention to regularities on more global level of discourse, might not be the best one (Cook, 1990; McCarthy, 1991; Salkie, 1995).

The aforementioned discussion explains the operations of texts. The analysis of these texts provides an understanding of language use. Interestingly, in considering all the surrounding texts to understand fully the utterances, evidences of code switching in a bilingual or multilingual classroom can be observed. These can be interpreted in many ways, and different meanings are yielded. Hence, the subsequent part explains the intended meaning of texts especially when there is an employment of more than one language in an utterance.

These models and theories of SLA therefore play an imperative role in language teaching specifically in bilingual and multilingual classes as language teachers can utilize them and at the same time enrich their functions in honing the language skills of learners. This is further corroborated by Bolos (2012) that having the knowledge and familiarity of SLA theories can ensure that language teachers are meeting the demands of their learners by engaging in professional development and using research-based practices and strategies to help close the achievement gap between peers.



CONCLUSIONS

This article discussed the different theories and models of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) which could be utilized by English language teachers as premise in their practices, learning strategies, and teacher strategies which will eventually help them become more equipped and prepared to teach ESL not just in Philippine context but in the whole world as well.

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