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AN INTEGRATED VIEW ON THE PROBLEMS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

IKKINCHI TILNI O`ZLASHTIRISH NAZARIYASIGA MUAMMOLARIGA INTEGRALLASHGAN YONDASHUV

ИНТЕГРИРОВАННЫЙ ПОДХОД НА ПРОБЛЕМЫ ТЕОРИИ УСВОЕНИЯ ВТОРОГО ЯЗЫКА

Annotatsiya: Qo`llanmada ikkinchi tilni o`zlashtirish nazariyasi (ITO`) muammolariga integrallashgan holda yondashishning afzalliklari haqida gap borib, muallif ITO` masalalarini o`rganishda tilga lingvistik, psixologik va sotsio-lingvistik hodisa sifatida qarashning ustuvor yo`nalishlarini yoritadi.

Аннотация: В статье обсуждается преимущества интегрированного подхода при изучении проблем теории освоения второго языка (ОВЯ). Автор подчеркивает основные направления подхода к языку как лингвистического, психологического и социо-психологического феномена при изучении теории ОВЯ.

Abstract: The article is dedicated to the discussion of the advantages of integrative approach to investigating the problems of second language acquisition theory (SLA). The author discusses the main trends in viewing the language as linguistic, psychological and socio-psychological phenomenon in studying SLA.

Калит сўзлар: ikkinchi tilni o`zlashtirish nazariyasi, integrallashgan yondashuv, tizim, sotsio-lingvistika, psixolingvistika, Proksimal Rivojlanish Maydoni, ma'lumot saqlash va qayta ishlash.

Ключевые слова: теория освоения второго языка, интегрированный подход, система, социолингвистика, психолингвистика, Зона проксимального развития, обработка информации

Key words: Second Language Acquisition, integrated view, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, Zone of Proximal Development, information processing, information storing.

Introduction

Second language acquisition is a complex process which requires looking at it from different angles. In this paper I will discuss how interdisciplinary view on SLA can explain this process broadly, taking into consideration different factors which are involved in language acquisition of a human being.

I. Definition of a Language and SLA

Before discussing the topic we would like to refer to Richards and Schmidt's (6, p. 283) definition of language that describes a language as "the system of human

communication which consists of the structured arrangement of sounds (or their written representation) into larger units, e.g. morphemes, words, sentences, utterances”. Furthermore, we would like to emphasize on the three key words in the definition above and build arguments on them.

II. “System” and Linguistic Perspective

The first key word in the definition above is the word “system”, which, we think, is closely related to the linguistic perspective of understanding SLA. Looking and considering a language as a system contributes to better understanding of how language works and helps us to identify how languages are learned. Here we would like to outline Chomsky’s Universal Grammar which explains this system with principles and parameters and which are inherent property of all languages in the world (7). As all languages share similar principles or structures it is easier to compare them and build knowledge of language based on that principles for a language learner. For example, learning Russian language in early years for a language learner sets a cornerstone for language learners’ further learning of other foreign languages. With the help of these principles they can compare and contrast structures which can be found in their native language, second foreign language and other foreign languages and decide on using this or that structure appropriately in L2.

Detailed look at the theories developed within the linguistic perspective of SLA and their connection with learners personal language learning experience proves us that they are reliable and to some extent applicable to all human beings. For instance, Krashen’s comprehensive input hypotheses about L2 acquisition, especially, his Affective Filter and Monitor Hypothesis relate to many people’s language learning experience. Even when students reach advanced levels of language learning they can feel the Monitor operate in their mind, which corrects their language output by suggesting correct versions of language before producing it. However, Krashen’s hypotheses lack evidence as Cook (3, p. 65-66) points out “it makes sense in its own terms but is not verifiable”. Krashen puts input in the centre of his hypotheses and tries to explain the whole process of language learning from the point of view that

SLA takes place in acquiring grammatical structures in predictable order which facilitates its reaching to inner parts of brain.

III. “Human” and Psychological Perspective

The next key word in the definition is the word “human”, which, to my mind, may be linked to the psychological perspective of SLA. As far as science declares, from all known creatures that inhabit the Earth, human being is the most sophisticated of them in terms of their evolutionary successes and one of these successes is well-developed brain, complex physiological and psychological system, which to some extent enabled them to develop an even more complex ability, namely language ability.

Psychology of SLA offers two frameworks for the exploration of how language learning processes occur in human brain. They are Information Processing and Connectionism.

Information processing framework attempts to scrutinize the process of language learning and factors involved in this process from the perspective of brain activity. Proponents of information processing model claim that learning process begins with declarative knowledge, and through practice the learned items become procedural knowledge. And this hypothesis we think is applicable not only to SLA but also to any kind of learning. In the classroom for instance language structure or an item presented to learners become declarative knowledge. In this stage noticing plays a crucial role. By noticing input becomes intake and it is further processed by the brain and stored in its parts. With the help of frequent repetition declarative knowledge becomes procedural knowledge, in other words it becomes automatic. For instance, in learning reading in L2 learners start reading words letter by letter and with time, through encountering the same words in different texts and contexts they start reading sentences word by word. Thus, the words become internalized and procedural for language learners.

Connectionism framework more or less clearly describes the process of first language and second language acquisition. Connectionism attempts to explain Second Language Acquisition in terms of mental representations and information

processing while denying the innate endowment hypothesis. Unlike behaviourism, proponents of connectionism suppose that second language learning does not occur in a sequenced stage but in a simultaneous way in different parts of human brain. In other words, connectionists believe that different functions of brain take simultaneous actions in retrieving, storing and producing language intake.

The next topical issue within the psychological perspective of Second Language Acquisition is motivation. To our mind, deeper exploration of motivation, its functions in L2 learning and processes involved in invoking and sustaining motivation can explain and reveal undiscovered paths in understanding the Second Language Acquisition. According to Dorneyi (4, p. 7) “motivation explains why people decide to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it and how long they are willing to sustain the activity”. There are many cases in my context where English language learners who had poor conditions in terms of materials, teachers, and environment of learning a language achieved good results in acquiring the language. And to my mind they were highly motivated learners and could sustain their motivation despite the difficulties they faced. However, Lightbown and Spada (5, p. 203) claim that “even highly motivated learners encounter great challenges in language learning”.

Among all perspectives the psychological theories of SLA seem to be the most complicated ones as the object of their study is human brain and psychology. There are many closely related assumptions on the nature of language learning and human behaviour in the process of learning second language in the theories of psychological perspective and socio-cultural perspective since the main object of their study is human. However, psychological perspective does not put much emphasis on the necessity of environmental factors that influence the nature of second language acquisition, whereas SCT stresses on outer factors that have an impact on SLA.

IV. “Communication” and Socio-cultural Perspective

The final key word in the definition is “communication”, which can be viewed from socio-cultural perspective of SLA. According to Richards and Schmidt’s (6, p.

89) definition “communication is an exchange of information between two or more persons”. As it is known communication and exchange of information is widely studied within socio-cultural theory (SCT) of second language acquisition, where Vygotsky’s thoughts play a central role. SCT sees a language as a cultural artifact which mediates social and psychological activities.

According to Vygotsky (2) language learning and development takes place in the world full of other people. In other words, people learn languages by participating in a collaborative meaning-making activity with other members of a given culture. People in our country who speak Russian language well are a good example to that as most of them learned the Russian language in social environments. For instance, the days when these people as children spent their days in a Russian speaking kindergarten, provided them with a lot of interaction opportunities with expert others in the Russian language and gave way to the development of their language learning skills.

“Scaffolding” and “Zone of Proximal Development” are the most influential and widely discussed concepts in SLA, which are borrowed from Vygotsky. Scaffolding can be defined as an assistance one gets from another person in learning something. The definition of scaffolding given by Donato (5) where he states that scaffolding is a “situation where a knowledgeable participant can create supportive conditions in which the novice can participate, and extend his or her current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence” vividly describes the potential of scaffolding in SCT. In case of SLA scaffolding can be provided either by person, who is an “expert other”, or a cultural artifact. All these processes take place in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Lightbown and Spada (5, p. 118) “ZPD is a metaphorical location or ‘site’ in which learners co-construct knowledge...”. SCT can explain the necessity and influence of parents, teachers, relatives and peers in learner’s life. For instance, according to my experiences of learning the English language in school or in a university, mostly it was teachers who played the role of “expert other” and it was their duty to create ZPD for our better learning of L2. In addition to scaffolding and ZPD we would like to mention the role

of concepts as “private speech” and “inner speech”, which more or less play a fundamental role in understanding SCT. It is a “private speech” that helps learners to imitate the English language structures they hear from their teachers or on TV or in any other environment and help them to learn the language better. Thus, SCT explains how we observed others using English language and imitated them. However, to our mind the socio-cultural perspective of SLA puts too much emphasis on the significance of social interaction in the process of language learning and in consequence fails to explain how language learning takes place in human brain and to what extent the complexity of language learning depends on the nature of language.

Conclusion

Taking into account all these pros and cons of perspectives mentioned in the paper one can notice that none of the perspectives offers full spectrum of explanation and scientifically supported justification of how second language acquisition occurs. Moreover, none of the perspectives and theories can stand alone without referring to each other. Language is produced, internalized, recycled, elaborated, produced and internalized and this process is infinite and cyclic. Thus, SLA occurs and it is especially successful when a language input is clear for a learner, it is internalized in his or her brain and which can later be elaborated with the help of interactive communication in a social context.

As we seen above the definition of language, suggested by Richards and Schmidt (7), itself proposes the necessity of interdisciplinary view in explaining the nature of language acquisition. Moreover, human language is not a phenomenon which can be viewed only from the perspective of psychology or nature of language or its place and functions in a society. It is a complex and sophisticated phenomenon which requires broader consideration. Since language is a product of these three factors combined together, Second Language Acquisition should also be viewed and studied from different perspectives. These perspectives fulfill each other and can act as a whole in offering us a balanced view of SLA.

Last but not least, in our humble opinion language as well as language acquisition is a divine gift which is given only to a human being. Though this perspective, we think, will never be considered by the theories of SLA and other science related subjects.

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