

SECOND LANGUAGE THEORIES

BEHAVIORIST THEORIES (INCLUDING THE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS)

- **Behaviorists:** Pavlov, Skinner, and Bruner
- **Definition:** It is the theory saying human and animal learning are similar.
- **Reinforcement:** L2 learning is achieved through reinforcement that is a kind of award or positive response given to students after their demonstration of L2.
- **Stimulus-response:** All learning takes place as learners receive linguistic input from speakers in their environment. Stimulus=input, response=students' L2 responses
- **Tabula Rasa:** Child's mind is seen as a blank sheet that is a place for new input coming from child's environment.
- **Habit Formation (Conditioning / Associative Learning):** Learner form associations between words and objects or events in their environment. These associations become stronger as soon as experiences are repeated. If the encouragement for correct imitations is provided the learner forms habits. This formation has three types:

1) Classical conditioning: The correlation between environmental stimuli and behavioral response:

eg. salivation of dogs

- Unconditioned Stimulus: food
- Unconditioned response: salivation
- Conditioning: ringing the bell while giving the food
- Conditioned stimulus: ringing the bell
- Conditioned response: salivation

How can the conditioning process be applied to learning a language?

- Unconditioned stimulus: water
- Unconditioned response: drinking
- Conditioning: saying the word "water" when water is presented
- Conditioned stimulus: word "water"
- Conditioned response: drinking

2) Operant Conditioning (instrumental conditioning):

eg. a pigeon in a cage (Skinner).

Positive reinforcement: giving food after a desired action (pecking the desk)

Initial pecking: free operant

Arguments of Behaviorists: experiments using operant conditioning can be extended to complex behaviors, habits. In order to evoke complex behaviors, another element (shaping or progressive approximation) is added to the conditioning paradigm.

3) Multiple-Response Learning: learner learns a chain of behaviors (L2) always in the same order. This is the extended principle of behaviorism to cope with “creative aspect of language”

Behaviorists’ Argument: we gradually build up associations between the words and group of words.

- Behaviorists think that for second language, there is interference of first language habits. Behaviorism is linked to **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH):**
 - If the first language and target language (second language) are similar, the learner will be successful in learning.
 - If there are differences between L1 and L2 the learner will have difficulty and will make mistakes.
- **Positive Transfer:** Learners use the similarities between their L1 and L2.
- **Negative Transfer (Interference):** When a grammatical structure or sound is different in the first language and the target language, the first language may intrude and cause difficulty in producing the new form (Horwitz, 2008). This is known as interference.
- **Fossilization:** When the L2 structures differed from L1 structures, reinforcement is needed. However, some errors become permanent and are resistant to change if not corrected. So error correction is important.

- **The role of practice:** Audio-lingual Method practices based on Behaviorism. Activities are based on repetition for the habit formation, and they are isolated from each other and contexts. For example, dialogue memorization, chain drill, single-slot substitution drill, transformation drill are some of the activities. They are all mechanical.
- Accuracy is important.
- Classroom setting is teaching-centered.
- Children only listen and memorize, they don't produce by using their creativity
- **Error Correction:** Errors have to be corrected as soon as they occur because they may cause fossilization.
- **The role of Input:** It is important because learners imitate and practice the input
- **The role of corrective feedback:** It is important because lack of corrective feedback or not correcting errors may cause wrong habit formation → fossilization
- **How to be successful:** The more practice (repetition) means the more success in L2. Being a successful L2 learner depends on how similar or different the L1 is to L2.

UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR THEORY (1980s and 1990s)

Chomsky (1965), Ellis (1985), McLaughlin (1987), Larsen-Freeman (1991)

- **Language universals:** There are similarities and differences among languages, and these are common to all languages of the world. These commonalities are called as language universals (Horwitz, 2008). Eg. every language has verbs.
- **Markedness:** Language features that differ from the universals.
- **Language Acquisition Device (LAD):** Children are born with a brain system that has universal aspects of languages, and this system is called as Language Acquisition Device.
- **LAD vs. BEHAVIORIST VIEW:** Nativists believe that children are born with LAD but Behaviorists believe that children learn all the aspects of languages by practice, repetition and reinforcement.

- **Parameter-Setting:** Features in LAD are possible features. However, when children are born into a language community, their brains “select” the form of each universal feature that corresponds to the specific language they are being exposed to. This process is called parameter setting (Horwitz, 2008).
- Rules of CORE GRAMMAR are easier to acquire because they are a part of universal principles; however, the rules of PERIPHERAL GRAMMAR are difficult to acquire because they are the borrowed forms or older language forms that are not preprogrammed as universal principles.
- **Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH):** According to nativists, UG no longer guides the acquisition of L2 if a learner has passed a certain point that they can learn a language. They also think that the ability to learn a language may decrease after a certain age. However, they are not sure about this idea.
- **The role of practice:** Students may need different types of exercises or activities in class depending on their L1 because they have different marked features. However, since the theory is based on L1 theory, the theory may not be applicable to L2 teaching environment although some researchers have extended it to L2 (Fundamental Difference Hypothesis).
- **Error Correction:** Learners should be made aware of the differences between L1 and L2 during the process of error correction. Teachers should correct errors.
- **The role of Input:** Learners are born with pre-set language parameters, so the theory does not talk about the input.
- **How to be successful:** If learner can transfer language universals from L1 to L2, he/she can be successful.

KRASHEN’S MONITOR THEORY (STEPHEN KRASHEN 1982)

1) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis: There are two ways for adult learners to develop L2: a) Acquisition: We unconsciously acquire as we are exposed to samples of the L2 that are meaningful. b) Learning: We learn L2 consciously by a process of study and attention to form and rule learning.

For Krashen acquisition is more important.

Learning cannot turn into acquisition (we cannot turn explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge).

2) The Monitor Hypothesis:

Acquired system is responsible for fluency and intuitive judgments about correctness. Learned system is a monitor making minor changes and polishing what the acquired system has produced. Knowing the rules is a supplement for what has been acquired so the focus of language teaching should be on creating conditions for acquisition rather than learning

3) The Natural Order Hypothesis

L2 learners acquire the features of L2 in predictable sequences as in the acquisition of L1.

4) The Input Hypothesis

Acquisition takes place by exposure to comprehensible input that contains forms and structures beyond the learners' current level of competence in the language ($i + 1$).

5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis

It is an imaginary barrier that prevents learners from acquiring language from the available input.

Affect: motives, needs attitudes and emotional states. The filter will be up when the learner is stressed. It will be down when the learner is relaxed and motivated. If the affective filter is low, learning is easy for the learner.

Problem: We cannot be sure about the affective factors causing difference on acquisition.

****Conversation Theories** may be thought as the basis of Communicative Language Teaching in which the primary focus is on using language for meaningful interaction and for accomplishing tasks rather than on learning rules.

The role of Input: input should be comprehensible, interesting, relevant, not grammatically sequenced, and beyond the learners' current level of competence. Also the input should be given to learners in L2 environment for acquisition.

Error Correction: In class, it should be minimal. If it is the L2 acquisition, none of the errors should be corrected. However, if it is the L2 learning, it should be minimal

because error correction causes a high affective filter. Also, beginner learners should not be forced to speak until they are ready.

Practice: Practice should be done in L2 environment that urges acquisition.

Activities: use of authentic materials, scrambled sentences, picture-strip story, role-plays

How to be successful: A learner can be successful by lowering affective filter and using opportunities for listening and reading at an appropriate level (i+1).

COGNITIVE THEORY (Ausubel, McLaughlin, Bialystok, Ellis, Anderson, and others)

Focus: general cognitive processes such as transfer, simplification, generalization, and restructuring

Opposed to Behaviorists: Learning does not come from outside or environment; it comes from mental activities.

Three important features:

- 1) Knowing rather than responding is important.
- 2) Knowledge is organized and integrated into mental structures.
- 3) Learner is seen as the one who acts, constructs or plans rather than simply receiving stimulus and giving response. He/she thinks, understands, remembers and produces language.

Automatization: the process of making a skill routine by consistent practice, which makes it learned response

Controlled Processing: Memory nodes are activated on a temporary basis, and the learner has to give his/her full attention to the process

Styles of Learners: Vernacular style is the informal use of language with little attention to form while the careful style involves learners who have to pay attention to form of their L2 production.

How information is processed: Declarative knowledge is explicit and conscious; it includes “knowing that” while procedural knowledge is “knowing how” (Hadley, 2011).

Model of Skill Acquisition stages:

- 1) Cognitive stage → declarative knowledge
- 2) Associative stage → procedural knowledge
- 3) Autonomous stage → language performance becomes more or less automatic and errors disappear (Anderson, 1995)

Learning types: Rote learning takes place if the material is not related to one another meaningfully; however, meaningful learning takes place if learner has background knowledge and if new knowledge can be integrated into the existing one (schema). Ausubel (1978) states that material should be organized so that it can be easily related to the existing one.

The role of Practice: It is not mechanical as in the behaviorist theory. It involves effort of the learner. Learners should be involved in practice starting with controlled processing to the automatic processing. Bialystok believes that explicit knowledge can become implicit knowledge by means of practice, which is just the opposite idea of Krashen. Furthermore, practice should be made meaningful and substantial so that learner can make connections with the schema and gain automatization.

The role of input: The more the input is related to schema, the easier to learn a language.

Error Correction: Error correction is based on meaning since the main aim is to build knowledge onto the schemata in a meaningful way. Also, errors should be corrected so that learners do not practice incorrect forms.

How to be successful: Teachers should provide real life opportunities to help them gain automatization and activate their schema with some activities in the pre-stages of skills.

CONVERSATION THEORIES

L2 acquisition takes place by conversational interactions or participating in conversations.

Scaffolding and how to become successful: L2 learners advance when they collaborate and interact with speakers of the L2 who are more knowledgeable than

they are. Hadley thinks that even beginning speakers can join a conversation if there is a partner who provides good scaffolding.

The role of practice: Learners should practice L2 by participating in conversations because scaffolding is necessary at this point.

The role of input: Comprehensible input is necessary. It means negotiations during the conversations should be meaningful and should make connections between words and phrases. → This also leads us to providing good feedback.

Error Correction: Errors should not be overtly corrected because teachers need to allow learners to participate in conversations as much as possible even if they only produce one-word responses.

Activities: Interviews, discussions, strip stories, information gaps, etc.

Conversational Modifications:

- *Comprehension checks
- *Clarification requests
- *Self-repetition or paraphrase

SCHUMANN'S ACCULTURATION THEORY (SOCIAL DISTANCE HYPOTHESIS) (1976)

The theory is related to learner's learning how to become comfortable in L2 community.

The importance of motivation: good learners are motivated, flexible learners who have little or no culture shock.

Psychological Distance: Learners' feelings about the L2 language and culture.

Some of the characteristics:

- 1) Dominance of L1 and L2 groups
- 2) Contact stance of L2 learners (preservation of his/her own culture, assimilation or adaptation).
- 3) Degree of enclosure (learners' having separate environments)
- 4) Degree of cohesiveness of learners
- 5) The size of the learning group
- 6) Degree of similarity between the cultures

- 7) Ethnic stereotypes
- 8) The amount of time the learners remain in the target country.

The role of practice: Learners need to practice and be social to improve their L2. The more they socialize, the less they will have social and psychological distance.

Activities: Role-plays, drama, gap-filling activities after a cultural video, etc

Error Correction: It might be useful if the learner has low psychological distance.

How to be successful: If learners have low psychological and social distance, it is easier for them to pick up the L2. The more they acculturate themselves, the more they will be successful.

ANSWER 1:

For Behaviorists, practice should be based on repetition and memorization so that learners can make habit formations because they believe that the more learners repeat the forms of L2 the better they will learn L2. According to Universal Grammar Theory, Students may need different types of exercises or activities in class depending on their L1 because they have different marked features. However, since the theory is based on L1 theory, the theory may not be applicable to L2 teaching environment. Thirdly, Krashen states that learners should practice L2 in its own environment for acquisition not learning. If the learners practice in classroom, it is not acquisition; it is learning, according to Krashen. When these are compared to the Cognitive Theory, it can be said that practice should not be mechanical as in the behaviorist theory. It involves effort of the learner. Learners should be involved in practice starting with controlled processing to the automatic processing. Bialystok believes that explicit knowledge can become implicit knowledge by means of practice, which is just the opposite idea of Krashen. Furthermore, practice should be made meaningful and substantial so that learner can make connections with the schema and gain automatization according to cognitivist theory. Furthermore, conversationists assert that L2 acquisition takes place by conversational interactions or participating in conversations. L2 learners advance when they collaborate and

interact with speakers of the L2 who are more knowledgeable than they are. Hadley thinks that even beginning speakers can join a conversation if there is a partner who provides good scaffolding. Learners should practice L2 by participating in conversations because scaffolding is necessary at this point. Lastly, according to Schumann's Acculturation Theory, learners need to practice and be social to improve their L2. The more they socialize, the less they will have social and psychological distance. For this very important reason, it can be said that practice is seen crucial in conversation theories and in acculturation for successful L2 learning.

ANSWER 2:

If I were to choose three theories, I would choose Krashen's Monitor Theory, Conversation Theories and Acculturation Theory because these theories are compatible with each other in terms of communicative activities.

Monitor Theory Activities: Scrambled sentences, picture-strip story, role-play

Conversation Theories Activities: interviews, role-plays, discussions, strip stories, information gaps.

Acculturation Theory Activities: Role-plays, drama, gap-filling activities after a cultural video, etc

As it is seen, role-play is the common one among these theories; however, it can be said that all these activities are communicative activities and urge the learners to practice L2 as much as possible. Furthermore, another common point of these activities is about the correction of errors because these kinds of activities support the idea that learners' L2 will naturally be errorless, so errors should be ignored.

ANSWER 3:

First of all, behaviorists believe that errors have to be corrected as soon as they occur because they may cause fossilization. When the L2 structures differed from L1 structures, reinforcement is needed. However, some errors become permanent and are resistant to change if not corrected. So error correction is important. Also, according to universal grammar theory, learners should be made aware of the differences between L1 and L2 during the process of error correction. Teachers should correct

errors. Contrary to these, Krashen asserts that error correction should be minimal in class. If it is the L2 acquisition, none of the errors should be corrected. However, if it is the L2 learning, it should be minimal because error correction causes a high affective filter. Also, beginner learners should not be forced to speak until they are ready. Just like Krashen's idea about the error correction, conversation theories do not favor it because they believe that teachers should allow learners to practice and participate in conversations as much as possible however they like. Furthermore, for cognitive theory, error correction should be based on meaning because the main goal is to build knowledge onto the schema in a meaningful way. And also errors should be corrected so that learners do not practice incorrect forms. Lastly, according to acculturation theory, there are some ideas that either favor error correction or not; they think that error correction is possible if the social community provides a low psychological distance atmosphere; otherwise, learner may be discouraged.

ANSWER 4:

How a learner can become successful is the main issue of all the theories discussed above. Behaviorists think that the more practice (repetition) means the more success in L2. Being a successful L2 learner depends on how similar or different the L1 is to L2. Another point of view comes from universal grammar theory that says if learner can transfer language universals from L1 to L2, he/she can be successful. Furthermore, what Krashen states about the success is that a learner can be successful by lowering affective filter and using opportunities for listening and reading at an appropriate level ($i+1$). Cognitive theorists believe that teachers should provide real life opportunities to help them gain automatization and activate their schema with some activities in the pre-stages of skills. There are different stages in teaching skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, and teacher can use pre-while and post stages to activate their schema. Moreover, according to conversation theories, L2 learners advance when they collaborate and interact with speakers of the L2 who are more knowledgeable than they are. Hadley thinks that even beginning speakers can join a conversation if there is a partner who provides good scaffolding. Learners should practice L2 by participating in conversations because scaffolding is necessary

at this point. To be successful, learners should actively participate in conversations. Lastly, the acculturation theory states that if learners have low psychological and social distance, it is easier for them to pick up the L2. The more they acculturate themselves, the more they will be successful.

ANSWER 5:

I believe that there is not an exact and excellent theory that can explain second language acquisition or learning; as a teacher I prefer to combine most of them and use the eclectic method. However, I usually prefer theories that support communicative activities. As a teacher, I mostly make students take part in class-activities. Furthermore, I utilize collaborative small group discussions to give students a chance to practice L2. Moreover, there are different stages in teaching skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, and I really like to use pre stage to activate their schema. Additionally, to evaluate their performance, I usually give research projects, portfolios, presentations and review quizzes after each unit. They write their reflections on their projects and evaluate themselves with my feedback. In terms of error corrections, during their speech, I prefer not to correct their errors but if it is repeated a lot although I give clues during the speech, I overtly correct their mistakes. In brief, I think I like the mixture of cognitivist, conversational, social theories as well as Krashen's theories.

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Horwitz, E. K. (2008). *Becoming a language teacher: A practical guide to second language learning and teaching*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Hadley, A. O. (2001). *Teaching language in context (3rd ed.)*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.