Second Language Acquisition

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION
Brainstorming

As soon as you hear the term SLA, what are the
- Terminologies that come into your mind
- Issues you have heard and/or interested to know
Objectives

- Exposure to theories and research topics in SLA.
- Exposure to the basic terminologies in SLA.
- Discuss original papers to learn about practical research design and methods.
- Relate to the teaching practice.

Formats

- Lecture
- Presentation (a major one and a review one)
Course materials

   ✓ Other supplements.

- Student name list.
- Topic sign up.
- Email info.
Why to study SLA?

1. Influence: 1-2 million official second language > 300-400 million native English speakers
2. Linguistics: The nature of human mind and intelligence
3. Language pedagogy
4. Cross-cultural communication and language use
5. Language policy and language planning
“When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the human essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to [humans].”

Chomsky, 1968, p.100
3) Language Pedagogy

- Pedagogical decision-making must reflect what is known about the process of learning, which is the domain of second language acquisition.
  - a firm basis for language teaching methodologies
  - Teachers’ expectations and assessment of the success or failure of their teaching.

- 中国英语学习者在5个句型上的句法发展阶段性研究
  - 中国学生和英语儿童在5个指代关系的句子结构发展阶段性上具有高度的相似性。二语习得和母语习得一样遵循一个普遍性的“自然习得顺序”。“
4) Cross-cultural communication and language use

- Many stereotypes of people from other cultures (e.g., rudeness, unassertiveness) are based on patterns of nonnative speech. However, many of the speech patterns that nonnative speakers use reflect their nonnativeness rather than characteristics of their personality.
- Example: p4
5) Language policy and language planning

- National language programs often involve decision making that is dependent on
  a) Information about second language learning
  b) The kinds of instruction that can be brought to bear on issues of acquisition
  c) The realities and expectations one can have of such programs.
How are second languages learned?

Multiple perspectives and methods from:
- Linguistics
- Psychology
- Psycholinguistics
- Sociology
- Sociolinguistics
- Discourse analysis
- Conversational analysis
- Education
History of SLA

- The field has a short history of 40 years.
- Journals devoted to SLA research include:
  - Studies in Second Language Acquisition
  - Language Learning
  - Second Language Research

- Journals that publish mainly SLA related articles include:
  - Applied Linguistics
  - Applied Psycholinguistics
  - The Modern Language Journal
Terminology

- **Native Language (NL)**: the first language that a child learns, also known as the primary language, the mother tongue, or the L1 (first language)

- **Target Language (TL)**: the language being learned

- **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**: in general, it refers to the process of learning another language after the native language has been learned. Sometimes the term refers to the learning of a 3rd or 4th language. The word acquisition in this book is used broadly.
Terminology continued

- **SLA**: learning of a nonnative language in the environment in which that language is spoken. This may or may not take place in a classroom settings.

- **Foreign Language Learning**: learning of nonnative language in the environment of one’s native language, most commonly done within the context of the *classroom*.
The nature of language

- All normal humans acquire a language in their first few years of life. The knowledge acquired is largely of an unconscious sort.
  
  - E.g. I want that toy that that boy is playing with. (relative clause modifying the specific toy)
Aspects of language

- Phonology: sound
- Syntax: order
- Morphology: formation
- Semantics: meaning
- Pragmatics: usage
Phonology

- Knowledge of the sound system:
  - what sounds are possible and what sounds are not possible in the language.
  - what happens to words in fast speech as opposed to more carefully articulated speech
  - what are possible combinations of sounds and what sounds are found in what parts of words
Syntax

➢ Frequently known as *grammar*: the order of elements in a sentence

   ▪ Prescriptive grammar: Rules taught in schools, often without regard to the way native speakers of a language actually *use* the language. Native speakers frequently violate these rules.

   ▪ Descriptive grammar: describe languages as they are actually used---*syntax*. 
Syntax activity

- Which sentences are acceptable or not acceptable (7 to 12)
- Which sentences are equivalent in terms of meaning (13 to 14)
- When to use different grammatical patterns (14b)
- How meaning is affected by moving elements within a sentence (15-16)
Morphology

- The study of word formation.
  - Example: unforeseen

- Morpheme: the minimal unit of meaning
  - bound morphemes: never a word by itself
    - prefixes, suffixes, infixes
  - Free morphemes

- What words can go with other words
  - high mountain
  - tall building
Semantics

- Study of meaning
  - Ungrammatical sentences can be meaningful (20-21)
  - Grammatically right sentences can be meaningless (22)
  - Referential meanings
    - e.g. leaves of a table
  - The way we combine elements in sentences affects their meaning (23-24)
Pragmatics

- The way we use language in context
  - Example 1: Telephone usage (25)
  - Example 2: Child language (26)
The nature of nonnative speaker knowledge

- Knowing a second language well means knowing information similar to that of a native speaker of a language.

- Assumptions: Learners create a language system, known as an *interlanguage* (IL). There are elements in the IL that have their origin in either the NL or the TL. There are also new forms which are the empirical essence of interlanguage.

- Fossilization; cessation of learning; plateaus; “getting stuck”