



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 4th December 2021 Accepted: 6th January 2022 Published: 12th February 2022</p>	<p>The article investigates what characteristics distinguish and unite first and second language learners. The predisposition of a child to communicate leads to an unconscious language acquisition if only there are right conditions, such as others' permanent talking to him/her or each other followed by sound imitations, and later words and sentences pronunciation. Nevertheless, this condition is not sufficient for second language learners, and more detailed instructions (grammar explanation, systematic vocabulary enhancement, and the like) are needed. The author has attempted to explore some different and resembling sides of L1 and L2 acquisition, enriching the article with some real-life examples obtained through componential analysis and observations. The examples are taken from three languages, i.e. English, Uzbek, and Russian.</p>

Keywords: First language acquisition, second language acquisition, bilingualism, telegraphic speech, linguistic simplification, overgeneralization, language deprivation, corrective feedback.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social creatures, which means that the ability to communicate is the main distinctive feature of other living beings. Starting from infancy, sound imitation, later words pronunciation, as a reply to our environment, occur, which, if directed correctly, further turn into a fluent and clear speech.

As a natural process, first language acquisition is a unique phenomenon that cannot be repeated regardless of the number of languages an individual learns throughout his/her life because 'the rapidity and accuracy of L1 acquisition is an established motor pattern ([1] p. 101). This is the reason why L1, and consequently L2 acquisition, has captured the attention of numerous researchers. The proficiency in both languages seems to be achieved in incompatible ways. However, most of the conducted research has proved the opposite highlighting the existence of miscellaneous similar points.

DIFFERENCES

While analyzing to what extent first and second language acquisitions are alike and different, the differences seem more obvious and thus will be discussed first. On a daily basis, people communicate with each other in various forms, including text messaging, using social networks, face-to-face conversations, and so forth. As the first language acquisition commences when we are toddlers, the ability to speak our mother tongue shapes naturally without much effort. Therefore, not enough significance is attached to this process. Being one of the most complex cognitive skills, a language is mastered by children astonishingly quickly who, in turn, learn it on a subconscious level by observing and repeating after the ones around them.

Second language acquisition, on the other hand, is a conscious process and is sometimes erroneously confused with bilingualism. Learnt simultaneously, the latter occurs in infants who hear two languages spoken to them or around them. Being bilingual means subliminally learning two languages at the time when the brain does not have any notions about language structures yet. Back to a toddler's period, it requires up to a year until an infant pronounces his/her first comprehensible word or sentence. This happens because of constant interaction between the parents and him/her. The brain catches the meaning of the words heard several times and attaches them to what or who these words refer to. Meanwhile, no formal teaching is needed for a child to learn his mother tongue. Whereas, a second language requires explicit instruction or education in order to be mastered. By the time a child starts studying another language, he has already had a clear image and structure of his/her native language in his/her brain which perplexes the acquisition of L2.

It should also be noted that the process of acquiring a mother tongue is quite rapid and happens simultaneously with gaining knowledge about the world, meaning there is no pre-awareness of numerous language functions, such as requesting, commanding, and the like on them. Hence, a child cannot have any expectation regarding the format and flow of such interactions. While fluency in a second language depends on that very language and indirectly on a person's

learning skills as well as his/her background knowledge. Humans never choose what their native language will be when they grow up, as they are exposed to it when they commence suiting the world around them. This is the prime reason why speaking and listening skills in a native language are developed without many obstacles.

In contrast, a second language is a conscious choice of a person, and it can be selected according to his/her needs. The time required for achieving fluency in one language or another is reliant on several factors. For instance, how close the language is to a learner's mother tongue or how well his/her language skills are developed. As an instance, we may take the Turkish and English languages in the context of the Uzbek language. Learning Turkish is much easier for an Uzbek speaker than English because they belong to one language family and, therefore, have similarities in vocabulary, most syntactic units, grammar rules, and even cultures as well. This, in turn, is not true for English firstly because there are some combinations of letters creating non-existing in Uzbek sounds or uttered differently. The sounds / ð / and /θ/, for example, are pronounced by putting a tongue between the teeth making either voiced or voiceless sounds. Discussing a sentence structure, in Uzbek, a subject mostly comes at the beginning, and a predicate is always placed at the end of a sentence. There are secondary sentence parts coming between them. In English, a predicate follows a subject, except for some adverbs of frequency standing between them. Therefore, being the easiest language to learn, English can still be complicated for Uzbek or other languages speakers.

Another noticeable difference is the age when a language is acquired. It has already been justified that children achieve fluency in their mother tongue until they are five [2]. Toddlers spend several years listening to the speeches around them, trying to utter some comprehensible sounds, and using telegraphic speech¹. Psycholinguists claim that if a child misses these five years serving as language milestones, this child faces extreme difficulties in achieving their mother tongue proficiency. In contrast, a second language can be started at any age, after one has become fluent in his native language. Despite the fact that good competence can still be achieved, the process of second language learning is rather slow. One of the widespread reasons why the second language learning process is impeded can be language exposure. The quality and quantity that infants are exposed to the first language are immense in comparison with the second. [3] They constantly hear the speech in their mother tongue until they grow and become able to independently produce a range of comprehensible sentences. There is also a high possibility that the native language will be the only one they will be continually surrounded with until they pass away.

This process is not always true while achieving second language proficiency. The common obstacle may be a lack of susceptibility to the target language. Sometimes the only place children or adults can be submerged into the language is their classroom – three hours or so a week, which is very little for mastering L2. [3] Another matter can be the teacher and how skillful he/she is in transferring his/her language knowledge to the learners. Although with the help of the Internet resources, learners can find big amount of useful information about how to practice a language out of the classroom or the instructions on learning it autonomously, not everyone considers it necessary to address some extra materials or cannot allocate more time for the language development. For instance, if the learner is an adult with full-time job and family responsibilities, the shortage of time can become a great hindrance in devoting oneself to learning a language. Therefore, both quality and quantity of a target language exposure vary mostly depending on the position a person holds in terms of learning it, whether the learner is a child in a mono- or multilingual family, a student in a classroom, a worker or a student abroad and so forth. [3]

Brown [4] suggests that the role of attitude differs in first and second language learners. According to him, the latter can treat learning a new language negatively due to the stereotypes in society or adults pressure. Whereas, young children are not affected by this factor. In other words, they do not have any other choice except for picking up the language they constantly hear.

SIMILARITIES

Investigating the similarities in both processes, the most conspicuous one is a pattern of development. Numerous studies have been carried out in order to understand the nature of first and second language acquisition. [5] As a result, researchers have concluded that regardless of the order of languages one is learning, be it first or foreign, he/she follows the same developmental sequences. Conducting an in-depth analysis of these sequences, Ellis [6] highlighted three main stages leading to language proficiency: the silent period, formulaic speech, and structural and semantic simplification. [5].

Research carried out in natural settings where learners are expected to produce speech more or less spontaneously to express meaning reveals that the first skill both first and second language learners confront with is listening meaning they all pass through the silent period, which is necessary to prepare the brain to get accustomed to hearing a new language. Toddlers acquiring their mother tongue go through this stage as they start to discover what a language is by listening to the others around them. Because of constantly being exposed to the language, not only do infants learn to communicate, but also begin to realize the world encircling them. Second language learners prefer to "keep silence" at the outset, as they are not required to produce speech instantly. During this period, the brain conducts the analysis of what a new language is like, whether it strongly differs or is similar to the learner's native language. However, the duration of the silent period in first and second language learners may vary, and the latter can be urged

¹ Telegraphic speech is the speech peculiar to children between 18 and 30 months. It is usually a two-word or short multiword expression a child produces while learning to speak. For example, 'Dog like bone.'; 'Dad go work.'

to speak as soon as enough listening is practiced, especially in classroom settings, whereas, children need a minimum of a half year to utter their first word consciously. Despite this fact, many researchers agree to emphasize the silent period, which exists at the early stages of mastering a language.

The second developmental stage is called 'formulaic speech'. This stage is characterized by the expressions that are not analyzed while learning and memorized as a whole, being later applied in particular situations. [5] These expressions can be in the forms of daily routines, such as memorized chunks or the ways of greetings, for instance. Emerging into a second-language-speaking world, the learners start to repeat the phrases that are mostly uttered in different life situations, e.g. *I don't care* or *Could you please tell me...?* without attaching much significance to their linguistic forms. Automatic repetitions are peculiar to children, as well, as they are not aware of what grammar means in a language, and therefore, imitate adults.

The last phase is about the application of semantic and structural simplifications by first and second language learners. Structural simplifications occur when the speaker omits some grammatical functors while expressing himself (e.g. articles, plurality endings), whereas semantic simplifications are about omitting meaningful words (e.g. nouns, verbs) One of the possible two reasons why these simplifications happen is because of lack of awareness in necessary linguistic forms. The other can be because the learners are unable to access linguistic forms while producing a speech.

The term "**linguistic simplification**" refers to any processes whose aim is to reduce the structural complexity of a text. [7] In other words, it means making a sentence more understandable and easy to produce. This strategy is common for both L1 and L2 learners, who try to turn information into a more manageable structure by suiting them to the needs, proficiency level and knowledge they already possess. [4] Children's telegraphic speech is a vivid case of the first language simplification. (e.g. *Mom want food., Brother water.*). Most second-language learners may omit auxiliary verbs in negative and interrogative forms while learning English. For instance, 'You come with me?' or 'I no understand you.'

Moving to another resembling aspect, both L1 and L2 acquirers make use of cognitive mechanisms to understand the linguistic system itself. [4] The research into children's idiosyncratic systems has revealed what strategies and mechanisms they employ to acquire their first language, which was surprisingly similar to what the second language learners do. According to the results, L2 learners could actively construct rules towards the target language as well as L1 acquirers. What made the researchers astonished was the fact that the mistakes occurring due to the transferring rules from one's mother tongue were often similar to those made by the child in the process of learning his/her native language. This suggested that the second language learners would apply alike strategies, especially overgeneralization and simplification.

In linguistics, **overgeneralization** is defined as the application of the same grammatical rules for the cases they are improper. This situation can occur in both children who are learning their mother tongue more deeply and in those who start to 'pick up' a foreign language. For instance, language teachers can frequently hear their students say, "Yesterday I eated three sandwiches and dranked juice." Likewise, children also tend to make such errors because of a lack of understanding of what the rules and exceptions are. Some of the common overgeneralization mistakes made in English are related to the allocation of -s morpheme to form a plural form of a noun (e.g. *foot-foots, children-childrens, etc.*) and -ed morpheme to show the past tense of a verb (e.g. *go- goed, make - maked, etc.*)

Similarly, in Uzbek, -lar, the morpheme used to form a plural form of a noun, a verb, and a pronoun, has different meanings. When added to a noun, not only can it mean plurality, but also respect. So, for example, if a child has one grandmother, he/she may be confused, hearing his/her mother say, "Buvinglar keldi." (You grandmother has come).

In Russian, a verb conjugation can be a bright instance of overgeneralization. The verb "сидеть" (to sit) has different endings according to the person and the number ("сидим" - we sit; "сидите" - you sit; "сидит" - he/she/it sits; "сидят" - they sit). However, when talking about the first person, singular, a consonant alternation in the root takes place because of which the verb is not *сиду*, a frequent error most first and second language learners make, but *сижу* (I sit).

Browns [4] underlines the role of society in proficiency in any language. Maintaining ties with society is one of the primary needs of all humans. As a means of communication, a language bonds a person with a society. Continual interaction with others is necessary to master a language, be it native or non-native. This interrelation demonstrates that a society needs a language to keep unity, and a language needs a society to keep development. L2 proficiency is achieved through continuous conversation with other learners or native speakers, like L1 is, for children start to perceive the world by learning to speak. The essence of continual communication can be demonstrated by the following experiment.

Throughout history, several governors have conducted language deprivation experiments which were quite violent, but important to check whether a language was innate or acquired. One of such cruelties took place during the rule of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in the XIII century. According to him, five newborn children were supposed to be raised without human interaction to determine what language they would begin to speak when their voices became mature. Their adoptive mothers could only feed, water, and wash them, but they were strictly prohibited to communicate with the infants. Unfortunately, the consequences were horrible, and the babies did not survive after three years the experiment had commenced. [8] Although people do not die if they are deprived of the second language interaction, the learner will not manage to pick up the intended language, unless he/she attempts to communicate in it. The fierce experiment has proven that society is one of the key factors to acquiring a language.

While writing about the similarities in L1 and L2 acquisition, the significance of feedback giving should not be neglected. Being a recent study, corrective feedback has been investigated thoroughly by Lyster & Ranta [9], who conducted an in-depth analysis to clarify the link between corrective feedback and learner uptake in a language classroom. Suzuki [10] highlights the contribution of Lyster & Ranta's research, which offers a systematic image of 'the patterns of interactional moves between teachers and students, such as the types of feedback according to the nature of mistakes, the types of feedback leading to better performance later or vice versa the ones which demotivated the learners. Corrective feedback is a pedagogical tool that aims to offer modified input to learners, expecting modified output from them further. [10] Therefore, the effectiveness of learner uptake depends on how skillful a teacher is in giving feedback that is able to inspire learners to not repeat errors.

Coming to the feedback by parents to their children who are on the threshold of mastering their mother tongue, it should be noted that parents should avoid lisping with their infants. When a toddler uses telegraphic speech to express his/her thoughts, it is frequently observed how adults mispronounce words to either cuddle their children or make some words "easier" to say. For example, a 'car' can be simplified to a *bi-bi* in many languages because of the noise it produces. In Uzbek, mothers usually call their children to sleep by saying *alla-alla*, meaning "lullaby-lullaby". After some time a kid's brain associates "alla-alla" with lying on the ground and closing the eyes in order to have some rest. As a result, a child gets accustomed to such speaking style and grows up with some speech disorders, like lisping, burring, omitting sounds, or distorting words. [11] What parents indeed need to do at a primary stage is to talk as correctly as possible and revise the mistakes as soon as they occur owing to the absence of grammatical knowledge in children. Since they tend to imitate what they see or hear from grown-ups, appropriate feedback greatly influences the fluency of their speech later on.

The author has experienced teaching English to local students and Russian to her infant nephew. In both cases, it was essential to correct the learners' errors before they became fossilized as well as those which were the result of L1 interference (in the case of the local students). The mistakes of the students were mostly corrected orally, sometimes by written feedback. Although immediate feedback, once the learners started their speech, would distract them making their thoughts flee, the author had seen noticeable improvement by the end of the course.

Written feedback was not as effective to emphasize grammar mistakes because the students would quickly forget what they had presented earlier, and thus it was not implemented frequently during the lessons. According to some observations, the learners who did not get much feedback, either oral or written, due to lack of time, could not make as much progress as those who did.

Analogically, her nephew receives immediate feedback while speaking Russian. As soon as he passed through a telegraphic-speech period, she was more attentive to the correctness of her sentences when speaking to her nephew. She tries to eliminate the errors in his speech instantly in order to prevent further repetitions. Russian grammar is full of various morphemes related to plurality and singularity of nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns and numerals, person and conjugation of verbs, declension of nouns and adjectives, and so forth. For this reason, producing error-free speech in front of a child is especially important.

The memory of a very young learner is fresh enough to remember any received information, as it is not overloaded with unnecessary data yet. Being inquisitive is peculiar to kids' nature when they start to realize the surrounding world and therefore absorb any information at a high speed. A language is not an exception. Like other peers, the author's nephew tries to pronounce independently a sentence relying on what he has already received. For example, he may say *я спю* (*I am sleeping*) instead of *я сплю* (the letter *л* does not appear when changing a person) because the infinitive form of this verb is *спать*. When this results in a mistake, he is taught a correct way not gaining any explanation, since he is too young to process this kind of information yet.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the comparison of native and non-native languages acquisition has led us to the point that both experiences can differ and follow a similar pace to some extent.

Briefly discussing the differences, age is the main factor that distinguishes L1 and L2 learners. Mother tongue is mastered unconsciously at the same time when a child starts to realize the world around him/her. A second language, on the other hand, does not depend on age and is usually learnt in accordance with a person's needs and wishes. Moreover, a child does not receive any formal teaching when learning to speak L1, which is required in learning another language.

Moving to alike aspects of L1 and L2 learning, Ellis [6] claims that both learners follow the same developmental stages. They are the silent period (learners first listen in order to get used to a language), formulaic speech (remembering and using a set of expressions without analyzing their linguistic forms), and structural and semantic simplification (learners can omit some grammatical and meaningful units to express themselves). Both learners can also overgeneralize grammatical rules owing to background knowledge. In addition, the role of perpetual communication with other people and high-quality feedback by them or by educators is of vital importance while acquiring any language.

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