

STUDYING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In this article we focus on second language learners' developing knowledge and use of their new language. We examine some of the mistakes that learners make and discuss what mistakes can tell us about their knowledge of the language and their ability to use that knowledge. We look at stages and sequences in the acquisition of some syntactic and morphological features in the second language. We also review some aspects of learners' development of vocabulary, pragmatics and phonology.

Key words: Morphological features, language acquisition, target language, interlanguage, design procedures, to analyzing learners' errors, simplification, contrastive analysis, irregular verb, learners' development of vocabulary, grammatical morphemes, article, probably, contrastive analysis.

During a sunny day, a cowboy go in the desert with his horse, he has a big hat. His horse eat a flour. In the same time, Santa Clause go in a city to give some surprises. You have three robbers in the mountain who sees Santa Clause with a king of glades that it permitted us to see at a long distance. Every robbers have a horse. They go in the way of Santa Clause, not Santa Clause but his pocket of surprises. After they will go in a city and they go in a saloon.(unpublished data from P.M.Lightbown and B.Barkman)¹. This year Christmas comes soon! Santa Claus ride in a one horse open sleigh to sent present for children. On the back of his body has big packet. it have a lot of toys, in the way he meet three robbers. They want to take his big packet. Santa Claus no way and no body help, so only a way give them, then three robbers ride their horse dashing through the town. There have saloon, they go to drink some beer and open the big packing. They play toys in the Bar. They meet a cow boy in the saloon.(unpublished data provided by M.J.Martens). Perhaps the most striking thing here is that many error types are common to both learners. Both make errors of spelling and punctuation that we might find in the writing of a young native speaker of English. Even though French uses grammatical morphemes to indicate person and number on verbs and Chinese does not, both these learners make errors of subject – verb agreement, both leaving off the third person -s marker and overusing it when the subject is plural (‘a cowboy go’ and ‘three robbers in the mountain who sees’ by Learner 1 and ‘Santa Claus ride’ and ‘they plays’ by Learner 2). Such errors reflect learners’ understanding of the second language system itself rather than an attempt to transfer characteristics of their first language². They are sometimes referred to as ‘developmental’ errors because they are similar to those made by children acquiring English as their first language. Sometimes these are errors of overgeneralization, that is, errors caused by trying to use a rule in a context where it does not belong, for example, the -s ending on the verb in ‘they plays’. Sometimes the errors are better described as SIMPLIFICATION, where elements of a sentence are left out or where all verbs have the same form regardless of person, number, or tense. One can also see, especially in Learner 2’s text, the influence of classroom experience. An example is the use of formulaic expression such as ‘one horse open sleigh’ which is taken verbatim from a well-known Christmas song that had been taught and sung in his ESL class. The vivid ‘dashing through the town’ probably comes from the same source. For those who are familiar with the English spoken by native speakers of French, some of the errors (for example, preposition choice ‘in the same time’) made by the first learner will

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be seen as probably based on French. Similarly, those familiar with the English of Chinese speakers may recognize some word order patterns (for example, 'on the back of his body has big packet') as based on Chinese patterns. These are called transfer or 'interference' mistakes. What is most clear, however, is that it is often difficult to determine the source of errors. Thus, while error analysis has the advantage of describing what learners actually do rather than what they might do, it does not always give us clear insights into why they do it. Furthermore, as Jacquelyn Schechter³ pointed out in a 1974 article, learners sometimes avoid using certain features of language that they perceive to be difficult for them. This avoidance may lead to the absence of certain errors, leaving the analyst without information about learners' developing inter language. That is, the absence of particular errors is difficult to interpret. The phenomenon of 'avoidance' may itself be a part of the learners' systematic second language performance⁴. Developmental sequences. Grammatical morphemes. Second language learners, like first language learners, pass through sequences of development: what is learned early by one is learned early by others. Among first language learners, the existence of developmental sequences may not seem surprising because their language learning is partly tied to their cognitive development and to their experiences in learning about relationships among people, events, and objects around them. But the cognitive development of adult or adolescent second language learners is much more stable, and their experiences with the language are likely to be quite different, not only from the experiences of a little child, but also different from each other. Furthermore, second language learners already know another language that has different patterns for creating sentences and word forms. In light of this, it is more remarkable that we find developmental sequences that are similar in the developing inter language of learners from different backgrounds and also similar to those observed in first language acquisition of the same language. Moreover, the features of the language that are heard most frequently are not always easiest to learn. For example, virtually every English sentence has one or more articles ('a' or 'the'), but even advanced learners have difficulty using these forms correctly in all contexts. Finally, although the learners' first language does have an influence, many aspects of these developmental stages are similar among learners from many different first language backgrounds. *Grammatical morphemes* Some studies have examined the development of grammatical morphemes by learners of English as a second language in a variety of environments, at different ages, and from different first language backgrounds. In

³Schachter J. 1974. An error in error analysis. *Language Learning* 24/2:205-14

⁴ Babayeva V.T. Mavlonova O', Ro'ziyeva D.S. IRONY IN DRAMATIC WORKS. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*. ISSN: 1475-7192

analyzing each learner’s speech, researches identify the OBLIGATORY CONTEXTS for each morpheme, that is, the places in a sentence where the morpheme is necessary to make the sentence grammatically correct. For example, in the sentence ‘Yesterday I play baseball for two hours’, the adverb ‘yesterday’ creates an obligatory context for a past tense, and ‘for two hours’ tells us that the required form is a simple past (‘played’) rather than a past progressive (‘was playing’). Similarly, ‘two’ creates an obligatory context for a plural *-s* on ‘hours’. For the analysis, obligatory contexts for each grammatical morpheme are counted separately, that is, one count for simple past, one for plural, one for third person singular present tense, and so on⁵. After counting the number of obligatory contexts, the researcher counts the correctly supplied morphemes⁶. The next step is to divide the number of correctly supplied morphemes by the total number of obligatory contexts to answer the question ‘what is the percentage accuracy for each morpheme?’ An accuracy score is created for each morpheme, and these can then be ranked from the highest to lowest, giving an ACCURACY ORDER for the morphemes⁷. The overall results of the studies suggested an order which, while not identical to the developmental sequence found for the first language learners, was similar among second language learners from different first language backgrounds. For example, most studies showed a higher degree of accuracy for plural than for possessive, and for *-ing* than for regular past (*-ed*). Stephen Krashen summarized the order as shown in Figure 4.1. The diagram should be interpreted as showing that learners will produce the morpheme in higher boxes with higher accuracy than those in lower boxes but that within boxes, there is no clear pattern of difference. The similarity among learners suggests that the accuracy order cannot be described or explained in terms of transfer from the learners’ first language, and some researches saw this as strong evidence against the CAH. However, a thorough review of all the ‘morpheme acquisition’ studies shows that the learners’ first language does have an influence on acquisition sequences. For example, learners whose first language has a possessive form that resembles the English *’s* (such as German and Danish) seem to acquire the English possessive earlier than those whose first language has a very difficult way of forming the possessive (such as French or Spanish). And even though ‘article’ appears early in the sequence, learners from many language backgrounds (including Slavic languages and Japanese) continue to struggle with this

⁵ Бабаева В. Т. “Деятельность современного учителя в контексте нового парадигмы образования”. Образование и культура. Векторы сотрудничества. Материалы межвузовской научно-теоретического конференции. Челябинск, 2019. Стр. 30-34

⁶ Ўсмир ёшида хавотирланишва депрессия – ёлғизлик ҳолатини келтириб чиқарувчи омил сифатида. Психология илмий журнали 2019, Б. 47-51.

⁷ Phonetics and interaction in German language teaching the role of methods. Journal of Foreign Languages and Linguistics. Volume 2. Issue 2. 2021

aspect of English, even at advanced levels. For example, learners may do well in supplying articles in certain obligatory contexts but not others.

Figure 1 Krashen's (1977)⁸ summary of second language grammatical morpheme acquisition sequence If the language sample that is analyzed contains only the 'easier' obligatory contexts, the learner may have a misleadingly high accuracy score. Another reason why something as difficult as English articles appears to be acquired early is that the order in the diagram is based on the analysis of correct use in obligatory contexts only. It does not take into account uses of grammatical morphemes in places where they do *not* belong, for example when a learner says, 'The France is in Europe'. These issues have led researches to question the adequacy of obligatory context analyses as the sole basis for understanding developmental sequences. The morpheme acquisition literature raises other issues, not least of them the question of why there should be an order of acquisition for these language features. Some of the similarities observed in different studies seemed to the use of particular tasks for collecting the data, and researchers found that different tasks tended to yield different results. Nevertheless, a number of studies have revealed similarities that cannot be explained by the data collection procedure alone. As with first language acquisition, researches have not found a single simple explanation for the order. Jenifer Gold Schneider and Robert De Keyser (2001) reviewed this research.

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⁸Kristen S. 1977. Some issues relating to the monitor model. Washington, DS: TESOL, pp.144-58

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