

Block**2****THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Block Introduction	71
Unit 1	
Language Learning and Language Acquisition	73
Unit 2	
Stages of Language Learning	84
Unit 3	
Strategies of Learning-1	95
Unit 4	
Strategies of Learning-2	105

EXPERT COMMITTEE

Prof. Ramakant Agnihotri (Retired)
Dept. of Linguistics
Delhi University

Now:

Prof. Emeritus
Vidya Bhawan Society
Udaipur

Prof. Yasmeen Lukmani
Retired- Dept. of English
University of Mumbai

Prof. Jacob Tharu (Retired)
Dept. of Evaluation
EFLU (formerly CIEFL)
Hyderabad

Prof. Pushpinder Syal
Dept. of English
Punjab University, Chandigarh

Prof. M.L. Tickoo,
EFLU (formerly CIEFL)
Hyderabad
Ex. Singapore University

Dr. A. L. Khanna (Retired)
Reader, Dept. of English
Ramjas College, Delhi University

Dr. Rajni Badlani
Formerly Reader
EFLU (formerly CIEFL), Hyderabad
Retired as Manager English Studies
American Centre, New Delhi

Prof. Neera Singh
Director-School of Humanities,
IGNOU

School of Humanities (English Faculty)

Prof. Anju Sahgal Gupta, IGNOU
Prof. Neera Singh, IGNOU
Prof. Malati Mathur, IGNOU
Prof. Nandini Sahu, IGNOU
Prof. Parmod Kumar, IGNOU
Dr. Pema Eden Samdup, IGNOU
Ms. Mridula Rashmi Kindo, IGNOU
Dr. Malathy A, IGNOU

COURSE COORDINATOR

Prof. Anju Sahgal Gupta,
School of Humanities, IGNOU

BLOCK PREPARATION

Unit Writers

Prof. Pushpinder Syal
Dept. of English
Punjab University, Chandigarh

Block Editor

Prof. Anju Sahgal Gupta,
School of Humanities, IGNOU

Secretarial Assistance and Composing

Ms. Premlata Lingwal
PA (SOH)

MATERIAL PRODUCTION

Sh. C. N. Pandey
Section Officer (Publication)
School of Humanities

August, 2019

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2019

ISBN:

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068 or the website of IGNOU www.ignou.ac.in

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by Registrar, MPDD.

LaserTypeset by : Rajshree Computers, V-166A, Bhagwati Vihar, (Near Sector 2, Dwarka), Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In order to effectively intervene in the language-learning process, we, as teachers, need to understand the nature of language and the language learning process.

In this block, we discuss the difference between language “acquisition” in untutored settings to the more formal “learning” of language, typically in a school. In Unit 2 we make the teacher aware of the cognitive aspects of language development and discuss issues such as the ‘critical age’ of language acquisition, the concept of ‘interlanguage’ and so on. We also briefly touch upon the social aspects of language learning.

The errors of learners give us an insight on how the process of language acquisition/learning takes place. In Unit 3, we present different views on learner errors especially the difference between transference and developmental errors. We also discuss the causes of different types of learner errors.

In Unit 4, we concentrate on the learner’s internal syllabus and her communication strategies.

While this block is not directly applicable to classroom teaching, we hope you will gain certain insights which will make you a better teacher.

The block has the following units:

Unit 1 Language Learning and Language Acquisition

Unit 2 Stages of Language Learning

Unit 3 Strategies of Learning – 1

Unit 4 Strategies of Learning – 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The material (pictures and passages) we have used is purely for educational purposes. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders of material reproduced in this book. Should any infringement have occurred, the publishers and editors apologize and will be pleased to make the necessary corrections in future editions of this book. Some of the material has been taken from earlier CTE Courses.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 What is Language Learning?
- 1.3 What is Language Acquisition?
- 1.4 The Process of Language Development
- 1.5 Vygotsky and Language Acquisition
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Suggested Readings
- 1.8 Answers

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Identify the different ways in which learners learn and acquire language;
- Explain how language learning takes place and how language develops and grows in stages; and
- understand the major theories of language learning and development.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For quite a long time our understanding of language teaching-learning did not regard learning of language from the learners' point of view. It was assumed that the teacher teaches and the learner learns. Whatever the teacher 'gives' to the learner, the learner takes in, and then produces it as language output. It was largely during the twentieth century, with the growth of research in areas of psychology, linguistics and also the biological sciences, insights into language learning grew to create a progressively better understanding both of the nature of language itself and the nature of learning.

In the course of this unit we will look first at views on learning and subsequently the views on acquisition, culminating in ideas on language development. We will refer to the major scholars who have researched in the area.

1.2 WHAT IS LANGUAGE LEARNING?

Acquisition happens as a natural process, learning in an instructed more formal situation. One way of approaching this question is to equate language learning with all other kinds of learning. Learning anything can be regarded as a change in the behaviour pattern, so that a human being can do something, whether it is to walk, or ride a bicycle, or tie shoe-laces, or speak. As the need to

communicate with others is a very basic need for every person, learning how to speak a language is a crucial form of behaviour for humans. And understanding how humans learn language is easier when we observe behaviour rather than inner states of mind or attitudes which we can't observe.

Environment plays a very important role in influencing all kinds of behaviour, whether verbal or non-verbal. The sense-organs of humans and animals are tuned to receiving many kinds of stimulus from the outer world. These lead to responses, which may sometimes be involuntary, such as a reflex action, (like salivation at the sight of food, or knee jerking, or blinking) or it may be voluntary — that is, the organism responds consciously. There is a connection between the sense organs. A baby watches the way the mother's lips move to utter a sound and hears the sound. It moves its lips in the same way to utter the same sound. Basic imitation thus becomes a form of learning. Then the same sound is heard with the same movement and repeated again and again. In this way, the behaviour is reinforced. This forms an observable and predictable behaviour pattern. From the very beginning, a set of habits is formed. When many sounds are heard and repeated, they form set of speech sounds that are the first steps in language learning.

Patterns of **stimulus-response** (also represented as the equation $S>R$) form the basis of the explanation of learning that has been given by the school of Behaviourist psychology.

Learning as Conditioning

Classical Conditioning: The Russian psychologist, Pavlov, was the first to formulate conditioned response (or CR) principle. This principle stems from the possibility of exploiting natural tendencies of an organism to respond in specific ways to stimuli, a stimulus being anything which elicits or calls forth a response of observable behaviour. Salivating of the dog at the sight of food, jerking of the knee in response to a tap below the knee, blinking in response to a flash of light, are all natural reflexes or responses present without prior learning. These are referred to as unconditioned reflexes (UR) in the sense that they are inborn or spontaneous.

According to the classical conditioning theory, if a second stimulus is frequently presented just before or simultaneously with the unconditioned stimulus, then this second stimulus presently comes to elicit the same response. This second stimulus is then referred to as a conditioned stimulus (CS), in the sense that the organism's reaction to it has to be conditioned or learned.

In the now famous Pavlovian experiments, a dog was presented food and it responded by salivating (UR). Then each time that the food was presented a bell was sounded (CS). Eventually the bell elicited the response of salivation. Diagrammatically this can be represented like this:

STIMULUS	RESPONSE
FOOD (UNCONDITIONED)	SALIVATION
FOOD +BELL	SALIVATION
BELL - (CONDITIONED)	SALIVATION

A somewhat more complicated and more widely applicable learning theory is termed **operant** or **instrumental conditioning**. These principles were largely developed by the American psychologist Skinner and represent to some extent a break from the classical stimulus-response models described above. Skinner proposes two kinds of responses – elicited and emitted. Responses elicited by known stimuli he calls respondents; responses emitted without direct reference to known stimuli he calls operants. The operant is postulated as more significant in human learning than the respondent (cf. Skinner, 1938). These responses are called thus because they operate on the environment.

B.F. Skinner experimented on rats to show that responses can even be given without reference to the direct stimuli, and result in change in behaviour.

In his experiment a rat was placed in a dark box with a lever. Each time the lever was pressed, a food pellet dropped. Initially the rat presses the lever accidentally as it moves around the box. Then when it realizes that on pressing the lever it gets food, it learns to ‘operate’ by pressing the lever, thus obtaining food. When the rat now presses a lever, for example, it has changed the state of the environment by its response or **operant**. The objective of the **operant-conditioning procedure** is simply to increase the frequency of the response — so that the rat presses the lever more often. On the basis of this type of animal behaviour, Skinner defined the notion of reinforcement. If a certain action repeatedly leads to a positive or negative result, the odds of recurrence or non-recurrence of this action will increase. Skinner speaks of positive reinforcement if the action recurs more frequently, and negative reinforcement if the action is not repeated.

In classical conditioning, the reinforcement is correlated with the stimuli. In **operant conditioning** on the other hand, the reinforcement is correlated with the response. When an operant has been emitted naturally, it is reinforced by reward, i.e., the naturally emitted desired behaviour is reinforced.

The cry of a child when it is hungry stimulates the mother to give it milk that satisfies its hunger. After some time this behaviour is reinforced and the response is applied to other things that the child wants. The first stimulus in the baby is hunger, leading to a response such as crying. The baby’s crying is a stimulus for the mother, whose response is to get milk. Certainly the first stimulus-response patterns are based on satisfaction of instinctual needs such as hunger, or warmth. As wants increase, the child may also use other responses such as gestures. These may elicit desired responses and the pattern will get reinforced, but if the desired response is not obtained, the reinforcement will get weak, or will be negative i.e. the behavioural pattern will not be formed. Therefore, the pattern of reinforcement through reward is an important aspect of how environmental conditions affect behaviour.

The linguist Bloomfield, who was also a behaviourist, explained this process in the context of language. Language learning is also a pattern of stimulus and response. Bloomfield suggests that a stimulus ‘S’ from the external world gets a response in the form of an action, e.g. if a person is hungry and sees an apple, this is the stimulus ‘S’. If the person then takes the apple and eats it, this is the response ‘R’. If, however, the person says ‘I am hungry, I want the apple’, this is a speech response ‘R’ to the stimulus ‘S’. It may also be a verbal stimulus ‘S’ for another person, who may then respond by an action of getting the apple, ‘R’, or respond by speech ‘R’. Speech stimuli are thus

substitute stimuli, substituting for the action. But they are equally a form of behaviour. Like other kinds of behaviour, verbal behaviour also follows a pattern of stimulus and response leading to habit formation through repetition and reinforcement.

To a large extent, this is useful in understanding language learning. The physical and social environment plays a big role in triggering the patterns of stimulus and response. Many speech sounds uttered in the immediate environment of the learner are observed by the learner to elicit encouraging responses from others. When the learner also imitates the same sounds and produces similar sounds, and gets similar encouragement, the pattern is reinforced. Encouragement is often in the form of actual reward or encouraging speech. Surely the delight on the parents' faces when the child first speaks and says 'Papa' or 'Mama' is a response infinitely valuable for the child, as it will reinforce the association between speech and parental approval which in turn leads to more parental attention and the child will be convinced that these forms of behaviour will enable her to change other people's behaviour towards herself, and the world around her.

Learning is conditioning. Is it conscious? Can we say that repetitive behaviour is conscious or merely habit driven? If a person is constantly repeating the same responses to a given stimuli, how does that person manage to speak words or sentences that she has not heard before? Perhaps a simple stimulus-response pattern works in early stages of learning, given the importance of reward and encouragement, but does learning remain mechanical at all times? Is it different for children and adults? Is learning the same for a second language as it is for the first language? Explaining language as conditioned behaviour may not answer all these questions as language in humans attains much more complexity than animal behaviour.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Pick out about five key words from the text that describe the behaviourist point of view.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
- 2 Which of the following is supported by the ideas given above? Tick the correct statements.
 - i Learners learn by imitating that which they receive as stimulus.
 - ii Reinforcement of a stimulus leads to conditioning.
 - iii Conditioning does not imply a change in behaviour.
 - iv Speech stimuli are a form of behaviour.
 - v Learning is dependent on rewards and punishment.

1.3 WHAT IS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION?

Take the example of grammar. A learner may be made conscious of the rules of grammar and be told that these must be learnt and remembered. This usually takes place in a formal context, such as the classroom. On the other hand, a learner may understand a grammatical rule without being told about the rules, or without attention being drawn to them. In acquisition, there is a cognitive grasp of the underlying structures. This happens in a natural manner, thus it is best to call it acquisition rather than learning.

The understanding of language acquisition began with an idea which was very different from the behaviourist view of language as conditioned learning. As mentioned earlier, one of the questions that the behaviourist view could not answer was that learners begin to speak language structures that they have not heard before. How does that happen? It was **Noam Chomsky** who gave an explanation for this: human beings have an inborn capacity to acquire language, by means of which they can generate infinite utterances. The human brain is 'ready' for language, in the sense that when children are exposed to speech, certain general principles for discovering or structuring language automatically begin to operate. This is called the **Language Acquisition Device (LAD)**. It works at a subconscious level, and includes knowledge about the nature and structure of human language, which may be **universal**. With its help, the learner makes hypothesis about language and tests it with the input s/he receives. Chomsky calls it **competence**, which is the internal knowledge of rules, and distinguishes it from **performance**, which is the actual use of this knowledge in speech or writing.

These ideas about language acquisition came to be called **mentalism**, as opposed to language learning as external behaviour which the behaviourists had emphasized. Some of the important aspects of language acquisition are that it takes place over a period of time in which the language develops not through imitation but through an **internal process of rule-making** by the learner. This is shown through the deviations that we find in the language of children. If child language learning were a form of imitation, the child's language would be exactly the same as the adult's. But this is not so. It means that the child is following an internal pathway in acquiring the language. Moreover, these deviations have been found to be systematic. We can view them as a part of the acquisition process.

Some examples of this are: when they acquire English, children use the regular form of the past tense — e.g. *telled, goed*, etc., instead of what the adults speak i.e. **told, went**, etc. This shows that the children are over generalizing the irregular form from the regular form of these verbs — that is, they are assuming that all verbs will have 'ed' at the end to mark the past. The fact that most children at an early stage in the acquisition of English make this overgeneralization proves that it is systematic. Similarly, the use of the plural is over generalized e.g. *mouses, mans*, etc. While adults use a lot of function words like articles, children do not use them at early stages of acquisition. This conclusively proves that acquisition follows a path of hypothesis-forming, deviation and rule-construction which is a mental ability and not imitative behaviour.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Try to think of some deviations that you have found in children’s language as distinct from adult language. Note them down here.

.....
.....
.....

- 2 What is LAD? How does it operate?

.....
.....
.....

1.4 THE PROCESS OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

While some things about the learning of language can be understood by the explanations provided earlier, further understanding of the process of language development is needed. It is clear that language acquisition is not present at birth, but takes place through **development of interaction** between the external world and the internal mental processes of the learner.

Firstly, there are cognitive processes taking place in the mind of the learner. The psychologist Piaget explained the developmental stages as those that involve a child’s logical reasoning and other conceptual capacities. These are reflected in the child’s use of language, and they enable the child to discover structures in the language that it receives from the environment. Further, another psychologist Vygotsky explained that these capacities are constantly expanding and modifying the input and are in turn modified and expanded by the language already acquired. Thus cognitive, social and language acquisition skills develop together.

Piaget considered the following stages in the interaction between the child and her environment: **the assimilation stage**, when the child absorbs the stimulus from the environment, and responds with the responses it has already acquired; then it reorganizes its own thinking to develop new patterns of responses. There is an interaction between what Piaget calls the old and new schemata in the child’s cognition.

Piaget then elaborated on the next stage, that of **accommodation**, in which the schemata are more fully reorganized. According to him, the stages through which children pass in their cognitive development are “**the sensori-motor**, from birth to about 24 months, when children understand their environment by acting on it, by touch and sight, assimilating different things from their environment. They are not able to deal with abstract concepts at this stage. Then, at the **pre-operational stage**, from around two to seven years, children develop a symbolic system, becoming familiar with concepts such as number, time, categories, and visual complexities. At this time, they can deal with images, drawing and painting and letters of the alphabet. At the next stage, the **concrete**

operational stage (seven to eleven years), children can perform many more mental operations and are able to conceptualize. At the **formal operational stage**, (eleven years and after), they can make inferences, deductions and deal with abstract concepts. These developments are linked to and often reflected in language acquisition, though the stages are not exactly parallel. A lot depends on individual abilities and on the kind of input which is provided by society and environment.

Following from the above, it can be said that there is an acquisition order: first, the simplified structures are understood and acquired, and then the elaboration of the code takes place. Research done by Slobin has resulted in formulating ‘acquisition principles’ or ‘operating principles’, as follows:

i. Meaning:

Children look for clear cues for underlying meaning: The full form is used before the reduced or compressed form, showing that the full meaning is important for the child. For example, the child prefers ‘the book which he read’ rather than ‘the book he read’, or ‘I would’ rather than ‘I’d’.

ii. Modifications:

Children look for changes in the form of words: Children assume that words are modified systematically, to bring about changes in meaning. A test was done to see what children acquiring English do when given two words: ‘wug’ and ‘gutch’, pointing to pictures of two animals. When shown two of the first, the children said ‘wugs’, while when they were shown two of the second, they said ‘gutches’. This shows an awareness that they could understand the principles on which the two words were being modified. However, they may overgeneralize when faced with exceptions to the rule. So they might add ‘es’ to all similar looking words — house, mouse, louse, etc.

iii. Order:

Children look for the order of words, example: prefixes and suffixes. Children follow consistency, that there is an order of parts of words within words and order of words within sentences. Children in the developmental stage of learning English rarely misplace the elements like *ed talk*, *toy the*. Of course, they may acquire the articles at a later stage, so at an earlier stage they may say simply *toy* rather than *the toy*, but they would not acquire it as *toy the*.

1.5 VYGOTSKY AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

While **Chomsky** and **Piaget** primarily concentrated on the cognitive aspect, another dimension was added by Vygotsky,

According to Vygotsky, all fundamental cognitive activities including language take place in a matrix of social history. He believed that cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are not determined by innate factors but are the product of the interaction between the individual and the socio-cultural institution in which the individual grows up. Consequently, the history of society in which a child is reared, and the child’s personal history are crucial determinants of the way in which an individual would think (Murray Thomas 1993).

One important tenet in Vygotsky's theory is the “**zone of proximal development**”. The zone of proximal development is the difference between a child's capacity to solve problems on his/her own and his/her capacity to solve them with assistance. The actual developmental level refers to all the functions and activities that a child can perform on his/her own independently, without the help of anyone else. However, the zone of proximal development includes all the functions and activities that a child can perform only with the assistance from someone else. This person who helps the child could be any adult and even a peer. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development has implications for language teachers. One of them is that the social environment of the learner plays a role in determining how the child will learn how to think because according to Vygotsky thought and language are interconnected.

Vygotsky believed that an essential feature of learning is that it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his/her environment and cooperating with his/her peers.

Therefore, when it comes to language learning, the authenticity of the environment and the affinity between its participants are essential elements to make the learner feel part of this environment. These elements are rarely predominant in conventional classrooms. (source: <http://www.sk.com.br/sk-vygot.html>)

Comprehensible Input

Although Vygotsky and Krashen come from entirely different backgrounds, the application of their theories to second language teaching has some similarities. It is now understood that language acquisition is meaning oriented and communication oriented. Language is acquired not when the input is repeated several times, but when that input is understood, when the learner understands what it means and can make use of it. Stephen Krashen, one of the researchers in language acquisition, has called it **comprehensible input**. A learner gets a lot of input from the outside world, but only that input gets acquired which is comprehensible to the learner. According to Krashen, there is a **monitor** in the learner's mind which helps in monitoring the input and makes use of it vis-a-vis the knowledge which has already been acquired, leading to an output. The “monitor” is constrained by three factors: ‘time’, ‘focus on form’ to modify the output, and ‘knowledge of rules’. The monitor allows the learner to self-correct, using the acquired knowledge in production. Thus, the monitor helps to modify, improve upon or correct the acquired system for better accuracy. Something that is crucial to the working of the monitor is the **affective filter**, which, when it is raised, allows the input to be understood. If it is lowered, it prevents input from being understood. Factors like stress and anxiety can **lower the affective filter**. **Therefore a stress-free environment is essential for language acquisition.**

Other studies have shown that the comprehensible input that a child can make use of is of a structured kind. Adults talk to children in a simpler language than they do to other adults. The mother talks in a simplified way to the child, a special language which is known as ‘motherese’. De Villiers and De Villiers summarized the differences between adult language and the language spoken with children as follows:

Level of Difference in Characteristics

Phonological: Altered tone: higher pitch, exaggerated, clear articulation, slower speech, more pauses

Syntactic: Shorter utterances, less complex, less embedded, less broken sentences, repetition, more content words, fewer function words, more questions, more imperatives

Semantic: Limited vocabulary use, concrete referents, less abstract items, limited range of semantic relations

These differences are evident when adults and children interact, as adults (particularly mothers) are mostly conscious of the child's limited knowledge and range, and try to make language easier for the child to comprehend. It is significant that imperatives abound in adult-child language, as children are mostly being asked to follow instructions, and discouraged if they don't. However, children also *overhear* normal adult language, and perhaps they can comprehend that, since they sometimes show evidence of such language in interactions. Thus distinguishing between different kinds of input is not always easy or uncomplicated. Some items in language seem simple but are acquired late, while others might be acquired early, for instance, in English, the past tense and subject-verb agreement are parts of the grammar that are acquired late.

Check Your Progress 3

1 From the above discussion, what do you understand of the difference between Chomsky's, Piaget's and Vygotsky's approach? List the differences.

.....
.....
.....

2 What are the functions of the 'monitor' in language acquisition?

.....
.....
.....

3 From the explanations regarding language learning and acquisition, think about the difference between learning and acquisition, and explain it in your own words.

.....
.....
.....

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have distinguished between language acquisition and language learning and acquainted you with the major learning theories of the twentieth century.

These include the Behaviourist Learning Theories, the Mentalist/Cognitivist and Procedural Approach, the Developmental Interaction Approach, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Krashen's Monitor Model.

It is essential for an English teacher to understand these theories/approaches because they have influenced second language acquisition theories as well as teaching methodologies. Also, all these theories give an insight into the language learning process of the learner, so to that extent it helps you understand your student better.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Chomsky, N. (1959) 'Review of B. F. Skinner, Verbal Behaviour', *Language* 35, 26-58.

Clark, H. and Clark, E. (1977), *Psychology and language: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. New York Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

De Villiers, J. and De Villiers, P. (1978), *Language Acquisition*. Harvard University Press.

Krashen, S. (1976), *Formal and Informal Linguistic Environments in Language Learning and Language Acquisition*, in TESOL Quarterly 10, 157-168.

Piaget, J. (1926). *The language and thought of the child*. English ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Skinner, B.F. (1957), *Verbal Behaviour*, New York, Copley Publishing Group.

Slobin, D. (1973), Cognitive Prerequisites for the Development of Grammar in Ferguson and Slobin, *Studies of Child Language Acquisition*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Van Deer Veer, R. and Valsiner, J. ed. (1994), *The Vygotsky Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.

1.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Imitation, reinforcement, conditioning, stimulus-response, repetition, habit-formation
- 2 (i), (ii) and (iv) are correct, (iii) and (v) are not correct.

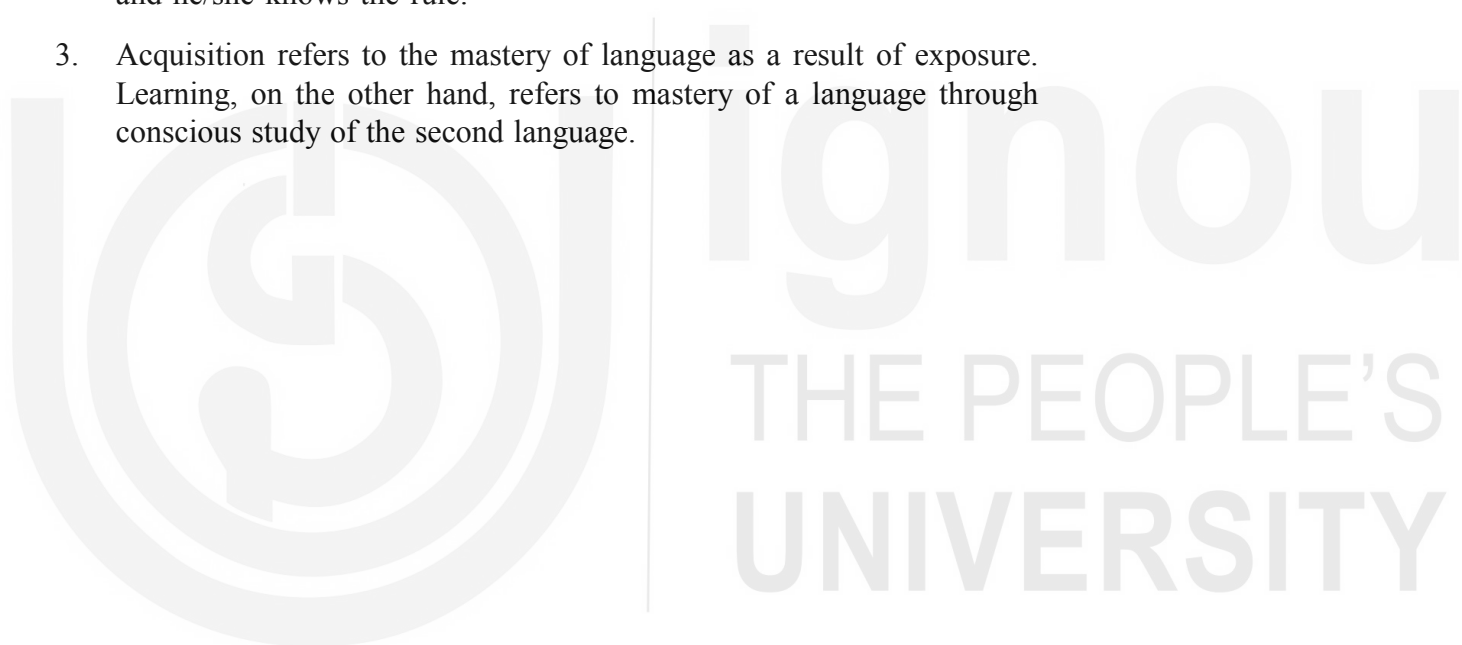
Check Your Progress 2

1. Do it yourself.
2. LAD is the language acquisition device which is innate to all normal children. It is argued that children are born with an innate capacity for language development. The human brain has an innate ability to learn language. When a child is exposed to speech, certain general principles

for structuring language operate automatically against which it tests the input s/he requires. The principle constitutes the child's LAD.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Chomsky and Piaget were interested in the cognitive aspects of learning, and in the case of Chomsky specifically language learning. Vygotsky on the other hand believed that all fundamental cognitive activities including language take place in a matrix of social history. He believed that cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are not determined by innate factors but are the product of the interaction between the individual and the socio-cultural institution where the individual grows up.
2. According to Krashen, the acquisition system initiates utterance, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule.
3. Acquisition refers to the mastery of language as a result of exposure. Learning, on the other hand, refers to mastery of a language through conscious study of the second language.



UNIT 2 STAGES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Cognitive Aspects of Language Development
- 2.3 'Interlanguage' and the Learners' Language Development
- 2.4 Difference and Difficulty
- 2.5 Social Factors in Language Learning
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will aim to understand stages in learning. This will help you to:

- understand the stages in the development of language in children and adults
- understand differences in stages in learning the first and second language
- know and appreciate difficulties in learning

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We know that learning does not happen all at once, but takes place over a period of time. It is a process of gradual development. In children acquiring their first language, listening comes first, followed by speech, then reading and writing. In the first language of the child, this sequence is clear. Throughout these stages of language development, the child makes errors and corrects them, or is corrected by parents or others in the family, and also by teachers. However, the situation is different for second language learning, as the natural sequence of language development may change, as well as the nature of the input given by others. Teachers need to understand the difficulties that learners may have at various stages in the learning process, including the errors that occur. Some of these errors are a natural part of development in all learners, while some are due to the influence of the learner's first language or mother tongue. In this unit we continue to study these processes further.

2.2 COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

We may examine some of the basic principles of cognitive psychology that apply in language learning. Firstly, language learning is a process of discovery. The

rules of the language are discovered by the learner gradually through trial and error, and an internal data-processing mechanism. The learner is participating in the process of learning through problem solving. In this sense, the language learning ability is similar to other general abilities and cognitive capacities. However, there may be specific language-processing mechanisms also. According to some theorists, these may be more active in childhood, and decrease by the age of twelve. Because of this, second language learning at a later stage, after the **critical period**, becomes difficult. Therefore, it is often advocated that if a second language is to be taught, it should be introduced at an early age, within the critical period. This belief in the superiority of young learners is enshrined in the **Critical Period Hypothesis**. Claims that human beings are best capable of learning their multiple languages between the age of two years and early teens (Lenneberg, 1967). A variety of explanations have been put forward for the apparent decline in adults' capacity to learn multiple languages. These include physical factors such as loss of 'plasticity' in the brain and 'lateralization' of the brain (cited in Cook, 2011). The contrary view is that age is not the crucial factor, but that there are other psychological factors, as well as social and situational factors that affect the successful learning of the second language. It may be helpful to consider these factors, particularly as there is an overlap between first and second language acquisition. By knowing about one, we can understand more about the other.

How does cognition work as a factor in first language acquisition? It is to be seen in the concepts that children form about the world and the meanings which they want to communicate. For instance, children form a concept about time, in which actions are to be seen and their meaning is to be communicated. The concept of present time is understood by a child and is reflected in its use of the present tense, whereas the perfect tense (as in English perfect tense 'he has worked') is not used till the child grasps the concept of 'present relevance' of an action. Such concepts are often embodied in the grammar of the language, so it is difficult to say whether the concept is formed first or whether the language helps the child to form the concept. And if we consider second language development, it is clear that the learner will need to develop new concepts, while acquiring the second language.

In both cases, when dealing with concepts, the child is also making sense of the linguistic system. According to Dan Slobin, the child has a number of **operating principles** for making sense of the language data. Some of these are:

- a) the tendency to generalize and to avoid exceptions. Children look for consistency of rules in a system.
- b) make underlying meaning relationships clear. This is why the passive, which places the noun denoting the subject in the second position is difficult for children, as it is more natural to express the meaning relationship by putting the subject first. Meaning is primary.
- c) join grammatical markers to functions. Every item in the system is supposed to function to communicate meaning, otherwise the child will not make sense of it. If an item is not being used to communicate meaning, as for instance a distinction of gender, it causes some difficulty.

Many studies of first language acquisition have shown that there is a **natural order of acquisition**, which is the child's order of acquisition of rules, or difficulty order. It has been hypothesized that there is a fairly stable order of acquisition, and there are similarities between learners as to which structures tend to be acquired early, and which are acquired late. Acquirers need not have a conscious awareness of the rules they possess, and may self-correct on the basis of a feel for grammaticality. This may be reinforced by corresponding inputs as the process of acquisition goes forward. Bit by bit, the child develops its own grammatical system until it corresponds to that of the adult. Starting from one or two word utterances, such as '*book chair*' (where the book is) '*hand sticky*' (showing hands that are sticky), the child is using a telegraphic way of communicating meaning. In a study, Lois Bloom found that sentences with only two nouns were used to express five kinds of relationships:

1. conjunction (e.g. *cup glass* meaning *cup and glass*)
2. description (e.g. *party hat* meaning '*a party hat*')
3. possession (e.g. *daddy hat* meaning *daddy's hat*)
4. location (e.g. *sock chair* indicating the place where the sock is)
5. agent-object (e.g. *mummy book* meaning mummy is reading a book)

This shows that the child is performing some communicative functions, as above, and these are elaborated further, e.g. negating, questioning, describing etc. (Slobin, 1979). Similarly, Halliday has also shown that language acquisition takes place as a child tries to perform functions through language, and learning how to mean. In this too, the order is predictable – the child first uses language as instrumental (getting something), then as regulatory (controlling others' behaviour). The functional use of language shows that cognitive factors come together with social factors in the child's development. In fact, pragmatic knowledge regarding the functionality of some items, in particular situations, seems to appear very early in child language acquisition and seems to help the learner to acquire other parts of the language according to their usefulness in social situations.

Other studies have shown that morphemes such as suffixes, and inflections are also acquired in a particular order. For instance, children acquiring English as a first language show a similar order of acquisition of morphemes. Certain morphemes, such as *ing* and plural are acquired quite early in comparison to third person singular /-s/ in the present tense, or possessive's marker, which tend to be acquired late. On the whole, subject-verb agreement is acquired later than plurals such as 's' and 'es' in nouns. Many more studies of morpheme acquisition have shown that this natural order of acquisition prevails in second language learning also, both in children and in adults. However, it is not the case that learners always go from simple to complex as we often assume, nor do they imitate parents or other adults. Roger Brown (1973) observed that the higher frequency of morphemes such as possessives, articles, irregular past forms (e.g. *went*) in the speech of the children's parents did not correlate with the order of acquisition of the same items in the children's speech. If language acquisition is habit-formation on the basis of stimulus-response, this certainly would not be so. The children would have imitated their parents' speech completely. But apparently this does not happen according to the morpheme acquisition studies.

Transformations of basic sentences also follow a sequence in development. In negatives, the negative element is not initially put into the structure but simply attached to the beginning, as in ‘*No going school*’. Next it may be attached to the ‘I do’ part of the sentence to produce ‘I do not...’ and change the verb to match ‘go to school’. These stages take place one after another, not simultaneously. In producing interrogatives, at one stage, the child does not invert the auxiliary. At the next stage, they can either invert subject and verb or attach a question word like *wh-*, not both. Later, both operations can be performed on the same sentence to produce the correct interrogative form.

Krashen’s monitor model is also useful in helping us to understand language acquisition. According to Krashen, the monitor comes into action when rules are being consciously understood and modified – in other words, the monitor may be seen as a bridge between conscious learning and unconscious acquisition. It is through the monitor that a learner can self-correct, as it involves a conscious perception of the fact that *something needs to be corrected*.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Take an example from your own first language e.g. the manner in which gender is marked, or number, tense, as for example the marking of masculine/feminine in Hindi in the verb (*khaya-khayi*). How do children acquire the concept regarding this? Did the fact that the language makes such a distinction help children to acquire it? Write down your opinion.

.....

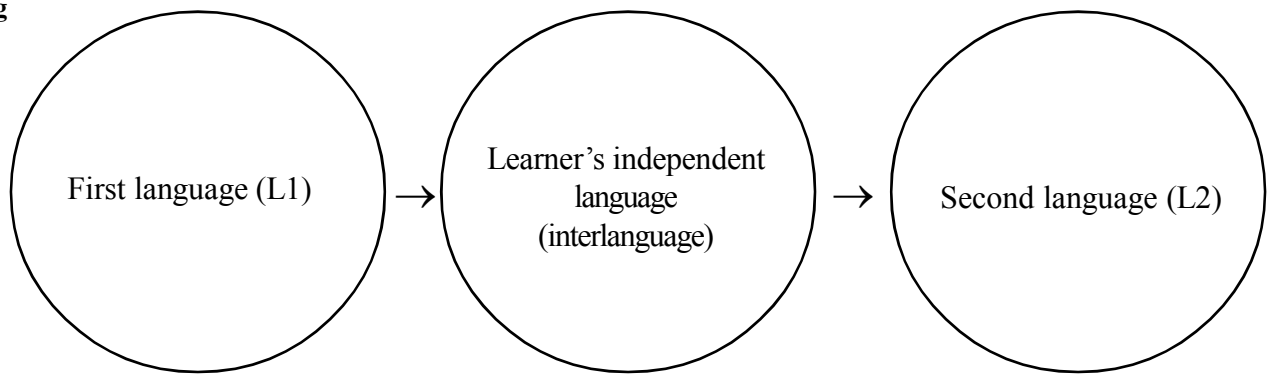
2. What does the ‘critical age for language acquisition’ mean?

.....

2.3 ‘INTERLANGUAGE’ AND THE LEARNERS’ LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

From the above discussion it is clear that learners seem to have a sense of the underlying system of a language as they continue on the path of learning L1 or L2. When it comes to learning a second language (L2), learners build a system which is different both from that of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Even if it is idiosyncratic and constantly changing, it is nonetheless systematic. Learners do not willfully distort the native system, but invent a system of their own. The term that has been given to this structurally intermediate status of the learners’ language system is **interlanguage**, by Larry Selinker (1972). This is also called **transitional competence** (Pit Corder), or **approximate system** (Nemser).

The Nature of Language Learning



The Learner's independent language (interlanguage)

Source: Cook, V. (2011) *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*

According to this, whenever one acquires another language, one develops an interlanguage, which is a system of rules and applications which may possess a) properties and rules of L2, b) properties and rules of both L1 and L2, and c) features of neither L1 or L2. We can say that that this is an interim grammar. If we look at the kinds of sentences a second language learner speaks, we find that it is not totally ungrammatical, and the learner seems to be following some kind of logic. The structure of these sentences may change after some time, marking another point in the acquisition of the system of the target language. This process will continue, with inputs from both the L1 and the L2. Therefore, interlanguage basically refers to two things:

1. The learner's language at a given point in time.
2. The range of interlocking systems that characterizes the development of learners over time.

In what way is this idea of interlanguage useful? Firstly, it tells us about the **continuum** of learning, the stages and the strategies of learners. The interlanguage continuum is a continuous path from L1 to L2 as shown below:

L1 — x — x — x — x — x — x — L2

Interlanguage continuum

Secondly, it seeks to explain why learners do not always achieve the full competence in the second language. Finally, it tells us a great deal about the errors made by learners and the reasons for these errors. Learners have a limited time and space for processing, and cannot cope with all the complexities of the language system at one time, so they limit the number of hypothesis they test at any one point in time. This is the interlanguage at one time. The series of hypothesis constitute an interconnected system and this process is systematic and predictable. All the researchers agree that we need to understand the learners' language as a system in its own right, and learners' errors are a sign of the existence of this system.

Thus, interlanguage is like a third language system. It is **dynamic**, **always growing** and **always is in a state of flux**. It is **systematic**, it has order – that is, it is structured like all languages. It is always open and ready to receive more input. To further explicate its nature, Selinker argued that interlanguage

is the product of five central cognitive processes involved in second language learning. These are as follows:

Language Transfer: The transfer of items, rules and sub-systems from the L1 of the learner to the target L2 is a necessary process in second language acquisition.

Transfer of Training: The learner transfers learning from the context in which he/she has been taught or trained earlier. If certain mental functions, such as certain concepts and relationships, are practiced in one context, they could influence other, related ones. The application of these functions helps in building a rule-ordered system.

Strategies of Second Language Learning: This is a very creative part of the learning process. Some elements of the interlanguage may be formed out of specific strategies adopted by learners.

Strategies of Communication: Some strategies of communication, such as conscious interaction with the native speakers of the target language, can also play a part in constructing the interlanguage. The learner tries to convey meaning even when he/she does not know the correct form, and this can activate the learning process.

Overgeneralisation: Some of the elements in a learner's interlanguage may be the product of overgeneralization of a rule that has already been learnt. It may be a rule of grammar or a semantic feature. The most common example is the overgeneralization of the past tense suffix in regular verbs, '-ed', which the learner uses even for irregular verbs as in 'go-ed'. It is a kind of simplification which enables the learner to carry on learning through using the simplified system till such a time as the next rule, or exceptions to the rule are understood by the learner. If the simplified system were not there, the learner would not be able to use the language at all, and therefore would not be able to acquire it further.

These five processes together constitute some of the ways in which the learner tries to internalize the system of L2. Some of these strategies will be discussed in greater detail in the next unit, especially the occurrence of errors which are an indication of the construction of an interlanguage.

It has been mentioned above that it may happen that learners stop learning at a particular point and not attain full competence in the second language.

Selinker has called this **fossilization**. **Fossilization is the state of affairs that exists when the learner ceases to elaborate the interlanguage in some respect, no matter how long the exposure, how much new input or teaching is given. Fossilization that occurs in most language learners cannot be remedied by further instruction.** Even the acquisition of correct language forms, when they do not change further, can be considered fossilization. The learner has reached a stage of development when a feature X in his/her interlanguage has assumed the same form as that in the target language. If, however, the learner has reached a stage in which feature Y still does not have the same form as the target language, the fossilization will be reflected as an error. It must also be said that if the learners' communicative needs are limited, there is greater chance of fossilization, while more and more need to use the language in different contexts will encourage further stages in interlanguage development.

Thus, interlanguage is a developmental process, in the sense that it is target oriented and has direction in terms of reaching stages towards a goal. Fossilization is a static condition, and suggests that there is a freeze on creativity.

After Selinker, a number of researchers have studied interlanguage further. It is recognized that interlanguage is **permeable** i.e. its structure can be ‘invaded’ by the first language, the learner may distort or overgeneralize rules in the target language to try and produce meaning. It is **dynamic** i.e. the learner does not jump from one stage to the next, but slowly revises the interim systems to accommodate new hypotheses about the target language system, first in one context, then in another and so on. For example, at an early stage, Wh- questions are non-inverted, but as the learner learns the inversion rule, he/she does not apply it *uniformly* to all Wh-questions. In the beginning, it may be applied only to some verbs and particular Wh-forms e.g. to ‘what’ but not to ‘why’. Later, the learner extends the rule to apply to all forms. This process of constant revision and extension of rules is a feature of interlanguage.

There has been some debate on how systematic the interlanguage is, and how variable – some say it is largely systematic and others say it is extremely variable. It seems that both aspects are part of interlanguage. It is possible to detect the rule-based nature of the learner’s use of L2. The learner does not select haphazardly from his/her store of interlanguage rules, but does so in predictable ways. He/she makes performance plans on the existing rule system in much the same way as the L1 speaker makes them on the basis of an internalized knowledge of the L1 system. However, individual variability at various points in the process has been observed. Although systematic and consistent, interlanguages may contain alternate rules for performing the same functions. On one occasion, one rule is used; on other occasions, at the same stage in development, another rule may be used. Thus, even though there is uniformity in the developmental profile of different learners from different first language backgrounds, there are variations in the overall course of development that learners follow. In an explanation given by Tarone, the evidence indicates that interlanguage, like any other natural language is *systematically variable*.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 What is interlanguage? State some of its main features.
.....
.....
.....
- 2 When does fossilization take place? Can you give examples of certain sounds or grammatical items that have got fossilized in the Indian context?
.....
.....
.....
- 3 What are the five processes involved in the learning of second language.
.....
.....
.....

2.4 DIFFERENCE AND DIFFICULTY

While the first language learner is learning everything for the first time, the second language learner already possesses a set of habits from his/her first language. Some of the earlier habits will help in learning the new language. Other habits may obstruct the process. Specifically, in the case of second language acquisition, the factor of difference between two languages comes to the fore. The difference creates difficulty. As Robert Lado has put it: 'Those elements that are similar to the native language will be simple (for the learner), and those elements that are different will be difficult.'

We may therefore compare the systems of the two languages, which is called **contrastive analysis**. From this, we can predict the language items that will cause difficulty for the learner. We can then give special attention to reinforcing the different items of the L2, either preventing those habits from being formed that are not according to the system of L2, or establishing the correct habits. As you may have realized, this approach is quite close to the behaviourist view of language as habit formation. The structures of the two languages may differ at some points and these are the points where greatest difficulty lies. This view treats the influence of the structure of the mother tongue or first language mostly as **interference** in the formation of the correct habits.

However, we can also see that the influence of L1 can be positive, in that some structures can be directly transferred from L1 to L2, particularly the similar ones. In the items that are different, there are levels of difficulty. The highest level of difficulty would be in those items which are obligatory in the L2, but are not used in the system of L1. An example is the article system of English, in which it is obligatory to use an article before a noun to mark reference. But for a native speaker of Hindi, this is not a required choice. This speaker would say 'Yeh kitaab hai' ('This is book') instead of 'this is *a* book' in English. Further, it is not only that choices may be obligatory, or not, but that each one may have different meanings and functions. So making contrasts between the structures of two languages at all levels is obviously very complex.

In addition, difference and difficulty cannot always be equated. It is not necessary that the different parts of the system will cause difficulty for all learners in the same way and at the same stage in their learning. It may be that a learner easily learns some item that is different from his/her own language precisely because it is so different that it is clearly obvious to the learner that it does not belong to his/her first language system, but to another one. It may thus be learnt quickly, as conscious attention has been given to it. At the same time, items that are similar in both the L1 and the L2 may not necessarily be simple for the learner to acquire. For instance, some Hindi speakers do not find it easy to distinguish between phonemes 's' and 'sh' even though both sounds are present in the sound system of Hindi. Later thinking on this matter has accepted that 'difference' is a structural notion (concerning the structure of the language), while 'difficulty' is a psychological notion, and depends on learner's perception, attitude, level of motivation, etc.

To conclude, contrastive analysis may be useful to some extent, particularly in conscious learning in adults, where the clear contrast between two systems is cognitively grasped and appreciated. But the complexity of languages often makes it problematic. It may actually be impossible to carry out a complete contrastive analysis, and doubtful that it would yield the expected results.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 What is contrastive analysis? Is it always useful in learning the target language?

.....
.....
.....

2.5 SOCIAL FACTORS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Language learning is a form of social development. The linguist Michael Halliday has drawn attention to the important process of socialization, in which the child becomes aware of the various functions that he/she needs to perform through the language. What a child wants to do with the language is crucial – starting from simple instrumental functions to more complex imaginative and expressive ones. In the behaviourist approach to learning, the environment is seen as most influential. In a cognitive approach, the attention is given to the learner’s internal processes. However, it is the social environment that triggers these processes, and provides the basis on which the mind works. This environment also includes the aspect of schooling and teaching which the learner is given, with the combined inputs from teachers and peers.

In relation to the role of social environment in second language learning, the idea of **acculturation** has been put forth (Schumann 1978). This is understood as the social and psychological distance between the learner and the target language. The positive social factors, through which the learner becomes a member of a social group are several: both the speakers and the learners of the target language should view each other as socially equal, both have the desire to assimilate, their cultures are congruent and they have positive attitudes towards each other. If these factors are not present, the learning situation would not be a positive one. But it is possible to have varying degrees of social distance. Psychological factors that increase or reduce distance are motivation, anxiety, culture shock, individual ego etc. Both these sets of factors determine the amount of contact that a learner has with the target language and also how much exposure the learner allows himself/herself. It also determines how far the interlanguage develops. With greater distance, the revision and change in the interlanguage towards the direction of the target language will stop. Brown (1980) has given the idea of ‘optimal distance’, and considers that the critical period for language learning is not dependent on age, but on the time taken for acculturation, which is dependent on the optimal distance.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1 Discuss the impact of acculturation from both the social and psychological perspective.

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.6 LET US SUM UP

All the factors mentioned above contribute to language learning, both in respect of the development of the child's first language, and in the acquisition of a second language. Cognitive processes are basic for a learner in order to understand anything about a phenomenon as complex as language. Equally, there are inputs from the social and communicative context which the learner inhabits, as well as formal teaching or training, and these are continuously processed by the learner. If found useful, these are integrated into the learner's system. The learner exercises creativity in this use of external input, and there is scope for individual variation. It may also be the case that in the absence of comprehensible input, or learner's own limitations, or first language influence on the second language, the development of some areas of the language may become static, and fossilization occurs. This may also happen if the social environment does not help in continuing the movement of the interlanguage.

Since our aim is to help learners, it is important to have this awareness of stages in learning. It is also important to understand that learners employ many strategies for learning. We will look at these strategies in the next unit.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Corder, S.P. 1981. *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Oxford University Press.

Dulay H.C. and Burt, M.K. 1974. 'Natural sequences in child second language acquisition' in Hatch, E.M. ed. *Second language acquisition: a book of readings*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Ellis, Rod 1983. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. 1975. *Learning How to Mean*, London: Edward Arnold.

Krashen, S. 1982. *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*, Oxford: Pergamon.

Lois Bloom (1993), *Language Development from Two to Three*, Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C. ed. 1978. *Understanding Second and Foreign Language Learning: Issues and Approaches*, Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House This collection of papers includes: Schumann, J.H. 'Social and psychological factors in second language acquisition', Nemser, W. 'Approximative systems for foreign language learners'; Selinker, L. 'Interlanguage'.

Roger Brown (1973), *A First Language*, Harvard University Press.

Selinker, L. (1972), *Interlanguage*, John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Slobin, D.Issac (1974), *Psycholinguistics*, Scott, Foresman.

2.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. In the process of learning a second language (L2) learners build a system which is different both from that of the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Learners do not distort the language they are aspiring to learn but in the process of learning, invent a system of their own. This system constantly changes as they improve their language and is known as interlanguage (Selinker, 1972).
2. This is the 'age of resonance' between the age of two years and early teens when children have the ability to learn multiple languages.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Interlanguage: The type of language produced by second and foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a language.

Some of the features of interlanguage:

- Dynamic
 - Always growing
 - Systematic
 - Permeable
- 2 Fossilization is said to take place when the learner ceases to learn at a certain point, no matter how long the exposure or input given to him/her. Fossilization cannot be remedied by language instruction. For example, you will notice that most Indians do not pronounce the sounds /θ/ as in 'thank', and /ð/ as in 'though'. An example of fossilization in grammar of most Indians is the question tag – *isn't it?* For example most Indians are likely to make sentences like – He doesn't have his book, isn't it? He finds time for everything but study, isn't it?
 - 3 Language Transfer, Transfer of training, Strategies of second language learning, Strategies of communication, and Overgeneralization.

Check Your Progress 3

The comparison of the linguistic systems of two languages, for example the sound system or the grammatical system.

No, it is not. Read Section 2.4 and formulate your own answer.

Check Your Progress 4

Acculturation refers to the social and psychological distance between the learners and the target language.

UNIT 3 STRATEGIES OF LEARNING-1

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Views on Learner Errors
- 3.3 Developmental and Transference Errors
- 3.4 A Consideration of Some Errors and their Causes
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Keywords
- 3.7 Suggested Readings
- 3.8 Answers

3.0 OBJECTIVES

To know our learners is the basis of learner-centred teaching. The aim of this unit is to enable you to

- understand learner's errors as strategies of learning;
- appreciate the changes in our perception of learners' errors; and
- be familiar with the causes of errors made by second language learners.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

We have understood from the previous unit that learners use cognitive strategies in learning and that the learning process is active, not passive. As part of learning, all learners make mistakes, even in learning the first language. Recent thinking on these mistakes or errors has changed and errors are seen as strategies by which a learner can test out the part of the acquired language. In learning a second language, the mistakes made by learners are even more, and are quite complex, because the L2 learners have already learnt a language, i.e. their mother tongue or first language. This is important for teachers as they are faced with the task of correcting the errors and helping the learner acquire the second language. If they know the causes of errors, they can find out ways of correcting them. They can also predict that certain errors will occur and adopt ways of dealing with them. In this unit, we will consider the role of error as a strategy of learning.

3.2 VIEWS ON LEARNER ERRORS

In terms of earlier views on error, influenced as they were by behaviourist psychology, it was seen that errors are a result of **wrong habit formation**. It was believed that the system of a language, whether it is sounds, or grammar or semantics, is learnt through imitation, reinforcement and constant practice or drilling so that the correct habits are formed. According to this view, therefore, errors are to be discouraged and even punished, and correct language is to be rewarded by approval, so that the wrong habits will not be formed and

the correct habits will be fixed. As we have seen in the earlier units, this is true to some extent, as a child learns with the help of approval by parents, teachers and peers, and learns to avoid errors. With regard to learning a second language, however, this creates some problems. Since habits in L1 have already been acquired, a fresh set of habits need to be acquired according to the system that prevails in the L2. As every language has its own system, there will be differences between the systems of L1 and L2. These differences will create errors when the learners apply the system of L1 to L2. In the view of the structuralists, these are to be seen as **interference** or transfer of certain features from the L1 into the second language. (See the discussion on difference and difficulty in the earlier unit). Essentially, then, the influence of L1 on L2 learning is seen by the structuralists as a negative one. It represents a failure on the part of the learner to form a new set of habits, and to modify the earlier set of habits already formed. Wrong habits formed in this manner would be extremely difficult to correct at later stages. The perspective is summed up as follows:

- i. Errors represent failure to learn a new set of habits.
- ii. Errors, if allowed to continue, will become fixed habits which will be difficult to correct at later stages. They must be discouraged.
- iii. In learning L2, errors are caused by interference from the learners' L1.

Though some wrong habits may be formed even in learning the L1, positive reinforcement and constant exposure makes these errors disappear and the correct habits are reinforced. We must remember that L1 is being learnt at a very early age and the young child usually receives positive and encouraging response and reinforcement. In learning L2, however, according to the structuralists-behaviourists the interference of L1 is looked at with disapproval, as something odd and incorrect, and as the learner may be older in age at that time, this negative response would inhibit second language learning. The features of L1, seen as errors, would have to be removed by constant drilling or practice, by repetition of the required features of L2, and this is a laborious and frustrating process for learners of any age. It may be seen that when two or more languages are introduced at an early age, children do not have much difficulty in keeping the systems apart and acquiring both languages with minimum 'interference'. We might conclude that the process of second language learning is determined both by the critical age, as well as by the difference in the kind of feedback and reinforcement offered to the learner.

Changes in this perspective on learners' errors have come in with more research on cognitive psychology. **It is recognized that all learners make mistakes, and try to correct the mistakes as they go forward in the learning process.** But first of all, we need to distinguish between **mistakes, lapses** and **errors**. Not all mistakes are errors. A person may sometimes make a mistake with regard to a language item which he/she has already learnt, and this will be a random one. When pointed out to the learner, it is quickly perceived that he/she knows that it is a mistake and may be able to correct it. It can happen suddenly, it is unsystematic, and thus cannot be predicted. It can occur in learners who already have competence in a language (for one feature of competence is the ability to recognize deviant sentences), but may produce something unacceptable or inappropriate in performance – in their speech or writing. It is a temporary breach of the code. In another case, a native speaker of a language may start a sentence, then break off and start another one with a different structure – a false start. If a misuse happens due to carelessness, anxiety,

tiredness or some distraction, it is considered a **lapse**. It may be a ‘**slip of the tongue**’ or ‘**slip of the pen**’. It might not be repeated.

On the other hand, **errors** are to be regarded as such occurrences that take place while the learner is yet not familiar with the system of the language to be learnt. Unlike the native speaker who can correct his/her own utterances, the learner cannot. We cannot say that the learner has committed a breach of the code, for he/she doesn’t even know the code. So, while a speaker with competence in a language can make *mistakes*, a learner will have *errors* and these errors are seen to recur predictably. What this means is that most learners will make similar errors at certain stages in their learning or acquiring of the system of the language, and we can fairly predict which errors will occur at a particular stage. **The error is a result of an attempt to learn the system.** Thus, errors are the learner’s strategies for learning and a sign that some learning has already taken place. In the words of Pit Corder, ‘from the study of his errors, we are able to infer the nature of his knowledge at that point in his learning and discover what he still has to learn. By describing and classifying his errors in linguistic terms, we build up a picture of the features of the language which are causing him learning problems.’

This is quite a different perspective from the one held earlier and marks a complete change in our thinking about learners’ errors. When a child first begins to learn its first language, we take it as natural that its speech will be different from an adult’s speech, and we accept these differences because we know that the child is still learning. Therefore we do not consider its language as erroneous. In fact, as Pit Corder states, ‘they are in a very real sense, utterances in a *different language*’. The utterances of a language learner are also similar. They are errors, but in a very different sense of the word.

This, indeed, marks the birth of our understanding of interlanguage. Errors are evidence of a system of language created by the learner. They show that the learner already possesses what Pit Corder calls ‘transitional competence’. In fact, just as a poet may make certain departures from the norms of the language, and create a different language which is unique, or, according to Pit Corder, an *idiosyncratic dialect* – idiosyncratic because it is a personalized code, and dialect because it is evolving and unstable.

As mentioned above, a linguistic analysis of errors (error analysis) is useful in helping us to identify the causes and types of errors that learners make. We already know that these are fairly predictable. Error analysis is a complete description that examines the linguistic processes and rules which are being applied by the learner. The systems and rules that work in learners’ language can be derived from such an analysis. With this understanding, we will be able to find an explanation of the causes of errors, and, as teachers, be able to devise ways to deal with them, or correct them.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 What is the behaviourist - structuralist explanation for second language learners making mistakes?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2 Distinguish between:
Mistakes, lapses and errors

.....
.....
.....

3.3 DEVELOPMENTAL AND TRANSFERENCE ERRORS

Once we recognize that errors are strategies that are helpful for learners to learn language, we can go further into the understanding of how errors occur. When a learner is in the process of learning the first language, the errors that occur are part of the child’s development, and are then considered **developmental errors**. But, when errors are produced in the process of second language learning as a result of habits formed in the first language, they are considered to be **interference errors**. Another way of putting it is that the first type of errors are, intralingual i.e. within one language, as the ones made by children in the early stages of development of their mother tongue, while the second type of errors are interlingual, i.e. resulting from the interference of the system of L1 in the system of L2. The latter can also be called errors due to **transference**.

According to the behaviourist approach, the second type – interference errors – predominate in second language learning, as it is difficult to overcome the influence of the mother tongue. But some studies have shown that developmental errors are more frequent. Dulay and Burt (1973, 73) studied the English speech of children whose first language was Spanish, at the ages between 5 and 8 years. They then studied the performance of the same children in the case of six structures that were different between English and Spanish. In their analysis, they found that only 3% of the children’s errors could be classified as interference errors, and almost 85% errors were in fact developmental errors. These errors occur because there is a constant process of **creative construction** being undertaken by the learners even when learning a second language just as it happens in the first language. It is not habit-formation, but creative construction that is the more significant process. The learner may not simply transfer rules from L1, but may make hypothesis about the target language, and may try to make some rules which they think might ‘fit’ in the target language.

Some of these findings have been questioned and it is considered that the proportion of the two types of errors is likely to be around a third or a half of the errors being due to transference. Even so, as Littlewood (1983) has pointed out, it can be understood that transference is also a strategy, and therefore part of creative construction on the part of the learner, not a mechanical kind of habit formation. There is no contradiction between these strategies adopted in first and second language learning as both are part of the effort to reach the final goal of competence in L2 as much as in L1.

For this reason, it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish between these two categories of error. We may look at the processes which take place in both instances as follows:

Overgeneralization: Learners always generalize, i.e. they predict that things that happen in one instance will happen in the same way in all instances. This

is a fundamental strategy which helps learners to form general rules on the basis of whatever data is available to them, and to predict and apply the rules accordingly. But they might be wrong in these predictions, because the rule may not apply to all the items, and the items may in fact belong to some other category than the one in which the learner has placed them. For example, one may categorize 'birds' as 'creatures which fly' on the basis of seeing several types of birds, and so when we see a new bird, we predict that it will also fly. But if the bird happens to be a penguin, or an ostrich, we will have made an error in predicting that it would fly. This error is due to our having *overgeneralized* the rule 'all birds fly' and we will have to learn that there are exceptions. In language learning, we may be familiar with some cases of adding 's' as a plural in a word, as in *boys, girls, cats, dogs*, etc. So we may overgeneralize and get words such as *mouses**, *childs**. These, as we know, are false predictions, or, in other words, errors. But they do show the learner's strategy in action: the learner is testing the rule through using the strategy of overgeneralization. Soon, the learner may find out that the plural of *mouse* does not involve adding an 's', or anything else, but that another kind of change has to be made in the word itself. A similar generalization made about *child* will prove to be false, and in this case, something has to be added, though not 's'. These are extremely fine modifications to the initial rule that has been generalized by the learner, only to realize later that it has been *over* generalized.

Over-generalization is a strategy that learners use to reduce the linguistic burden in learning. It may be perceived by the learner that some rules are extra, or redundant, and can be reduced without affecting the meaning. For example, a speaker may say 'Yesterday I go to the university and meet my teacher', and omits the past tense because it seems that the sense of the past is already indicated by the lexical item 'yesterday'. Thus, the number of tasks involved in sentence production are cut down. Ervin-Tripp (1969) has also pointed out that 'possibly the morphological and syntactic simplifications of second language learners correspond to some simplification common among children (i.e. mother tongue speakers) learning the same language.'

Simplification is a part of the strategy of over-generalization, as the initial impulse of the learner is to simplify the complex system of rules in the target language. It is quite crucial for the learner to simplify, as without simplification the process of learning could hardly begin. Through it, the complex linguistic data can be made more manageable, by fitting it into a framework of rules that the learner already possesses. This is a productive strategy, because through it, new utterances can be created for expression of new meanings. Thus, it is very useful to the learner, and it is essential for the teacher to understand this, rather than to condemn any error resulting from it.

Another type of simplification is **omission**, where some morphemes or other items may be missed out, as in 'no understand' or 'mommy sock'. In some cases, the message may not be clear. The learner may use omission to make communication shorter and easier, but it may not lead to productivity. It seems to be due more to the learner's limitations, and not due to the creative construction of rules and therefore may not help in further progress of the learner's language.

Ignorance of rule restrictions is the ignorance of certain constraints on the use of rules. When rules are applied to contexts where they don't apply, an error occurs. For example, when a preposition is required in one context, but not in another, this would be a restriction on the use of that preposition. *With*

may be used in contexts where another preposition is required, as 'fight *against* the enemy', 'suffering *from* a cold'. Similarly, the preposition *of* is used in 'consist of', but not used in 'comprise'. It is restricted. Such errors are another form of over-generalisation, since a previously learnt rule is being used in a new situation.

Incomplete application of rules is a cause of error, which again may be due to the learner's perception of redundancy, according to which the learner thinks that elaborate rules are needed to communicate, and does not have the motivation/resources to learn the complete rules. This is to be observed most frequently in the use of questions, where all the rules for forming a question may not be applied e.g. non-inversion of auxiliary as **Why the book was written?* or in **Why he wrote this book?* (both incorrect) in which the do-support has to be used to convey the past 'did', while *write* will be retained and not changed to *wrote*. It seems simpler for the learner to change the tense in the main verb and add the 'wh' form to the sentence rather than go into the complexity of inserting 'do' in the position where it is needed. If all the rules were followed, the correct sentences would be 'Why was the book written?' and 'Why did he write this book?'

Making false hypothesis: A learner may arrive at a false hypothesis on the basis of restricted language data, or the learner may be given false hints or comparisons. An instance of this is that of using 'too' as synonymous with 'very' as in: 'the weather is too fine' or 'honey is too sweet'. This is the result of not being aware of distinctions in the target language. Other such hypothesis are the assumption that some words can be used synonymously, such as bring/take, do/make, whereas they are not.

Transference is part of the same kind of strategy that is involved in overgeneralization. Both are based on the same fact that a learner uses whatever he/she already knows about language in order to learn more, whether that knowledge is from what the learner already knows of the second language, or whether it is the knowledge of the mother tongue or the first language. It is quite natural for the learner to transfer knowledge of the mother tongue in order to test out hypothesis in the second language. In the beginning stages, the transfer errors are more frequent and they decrease as more and more of the second language is learnt.

A method used to find out the transference errors is that of **contrastive analysis** of the two languages involved. This is mainly built on the link between difference and difficulty which was discussed in the previous unit. The two languages L1 and L2, are described systematically so that the problems of the learner in learning the L2 can be predicted. This is done at all levels of the language structure – the sound system (vowels, consonants, stress patterns, intonation), word formation (suffixes, compounding, inflections etc), syntax (word order, agreement, concord, transformations, etc.), semantics (synonymy, assignment of meaning to particular utterances, collocations, etc). There are bound to be differences between the two languages at all these levels, and these differences can be potential sources of error. Broadly, these differences are as follows:

- The second language has features which do not exist at all in the first language. For example, at the level of the sound system, English may have certain sounds that may not be there in, say, Hindi. There are sounds such

as fricatives (as *th* in think, thank etc), or the /f/-/v/ pair of labio-dental fricatives, or diphthongs (vowel glides like /ei/, /au/) which are not there in Hindi. One of the frequent short vowels in English, /e/ as in *rest, bread* etc., is not there in Hindi, and the Hindi speaker replaces it with a sound that makes the words sound as if they rhyme with *raised, braid*.

At the level of syntax, one obvious example of difference is that of the article system in English (a, an, the) and Hindi and other Indian languages.

- In other cases, the feature or item may be there in both languages, but its distribution – in other words, the rules of combination with other items may be different. For example, the sound /p/ is there in the sound systems of both Hindi and English, but while there are allophones of /p/ in English (which means that this sound is aspirated [p^h] when it occurs in the beginnings of words as in [p^hen], and unaspirated /p/ as in ‘replace’ when it occurs elsewhere), in Hindi this does not happen, so Hindi speaking learners of English would not be aware of aspiration or would not be able to produce it in the correct way.

In syntax, there is the difference in word order, and rules of formation of sentences. For example, while both Hindi and English have forms that mark interrogative (wh-forms in English, such as *why, where, what*, and *kyo, kahan, kya* in Hindi) they are placed differently. In English, there is wh-fronting, that is, the wh- form is used at the head of the sentence, and the auxiliary is placed after that, while the subject follows after auxiliary as in *where are you going?* On the other hand, in Hindi, questions are formed by inserting the question form after the subject of the sentence without making any other change in the basic affirmative sentence, as in *tum kahan ja rahe ho* – *you where going are*. When Hindi speakers attempt to form an interrogative in English, they often do not change the word order. They do observe wh- fronting, but do not change the order of the auxiliary, producing the incorrect sentence **Where you are going?*

Such differences show that learners invariably use the structures of L1 in learning L2. There are, however, areas of uncertainty as to whether most errors of the second language learner can be considered as transference from L1. For example, a learner may produce the word *longingness*, by adding the suffix *-ness* as it is added to *happy* to form *happiness*, to *sad* to form *sadness*. Here, the learner is generalizing from a rule he/she already knows about adding the suffix *-ness* to a word to make another word. But this is not a transference error and any learner, regardless of what his/her first language is, might make such an error. However, take a word such as *proudy*. It is an error made by many Indian speakers of English. We might consider this to be the result of a generalization, that the learner is incorrectly adding the suffix *-y* to a word, assuming that adding this suffix is necessary to denote the quality of something. Or we might say that this is a transference error, as in Hindi, a proud person would be called *ghamand-i*, the suffix ‘i’ denoting the quality (also *sharab-i*). It might be difficult to ascertain the exact cause of errors like these.

Apart from the contrastive, a non-contrastive approach holds that language transference is not a sign of the learner's inability to cope with the second language and inability to overcome the influence of the first language, but a sign of interaction of the first language with the developmental process in the second language. This is perhaps why the two processes – developmental and transference, seem to overlap.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Distinguish between transference and developmental errors.

.....
.....

- 2 Discuss five strategies which learners use in learning L2?

.....
.....

3.4 A CONSIDERATION OF SOME ERRORS AND THEIR CAUSES

Errors can occur at all levels of the language: phonology, graphology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. They can be both productive and receptive. We often understand errors only when they are actually produced, but behind the production of the error, there may be a receptive error for instance, in listening or reading comprehension. Though these errors are difficult to pinpoint, they can often be traced during classroom activities and exercises. In production, errors can be traced through the following linguistic markers: omission, addition, deletion and reordering of items.

Wrong or faulty teaching may also be the cause of some errors. For example, learners of English are often taught that the 'is' form of the verb 'be' is to be used for present tense and for present continuous e.g. *he is a writer* and *he is writing*. This may result in an invariant use of 'is' with every verb in the present tense e.g. '*he is writes*', '*he is die*' etc. The learner has over-learned the structure. Often, the teacher's language may also display instances in which fossilization has occurred, and this may have an impact on the learner. Often, teachers in the Indian context use interrogative sentences without inversion of the auxiliary e.g. **when you will go home?* Another instance is that of reduplication, which is a case of transfer of strategies used in Indian and other South Asian languages e.g. **Finish your work fast fast*. In fact these cases show that an interlanguage has become a language in its own right, and this appears to be a matter beyond error analysis, towards the formation of a new system.

What then is the teacher's role in the correction of errors? As we have seen, the behaviourist approach on which remedial teaching is based, is that of drilling and repetition of sounds, structures, etc., in order to erase the wrong habit and reinforce the correct one in its place. The pattern of reward and punishment is favoured by the behaviorist approach. However, it is also discouraging for the learner, as the sheer number of errors may be difficult for both the learner and teacher to correct, and a punitive attitude towards errors will result in hesitation, nervousness and lack of motivation.

The later view of errors as conscious strategy is that errors can be classified and predicted. This means that exercises and practices can be made that prevent errors from taking place. Strategies such as generalization etc., are to be seen as active attempts by the learner to figure out the system of the target language. Exposure to the language as well as opportunities to use the language through fluency, practice in an encouraging environment will help the learner to move from over-generalization to a more accurate grasp of the complexities of rules and an elaboration of the code. In the case of transfer, the awareness of contrasts between the systems of L1 and L2 may help the learner in understanding and error-correction, but transfer is to be regarded as part of other strategies, and the learner can use most of these strategies in combination. The teacher's task would be to facilitate the operation of these strategies by providing comprehensible input and fluency practice. The practices of peer-correction and self-correction can also be facilitated in the classroom.

Check Your Progress 3

1. What are the causes of the following examples of errors:
 - a. The kite was strunged on the tree.
 - b. Don't make noise here.
 - c. Who did write this book?
 - d. The food is too good.
 - e. The child felt hungryness.
 - f. No singing song.
2. Make a list of some frequent errors made by learners of English in your own context, and analyse their possible causes.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

A basic consideration of learners' strategies tells us about the nature of learners' errors, which are essential strategies in learning. Error analysis and interlanguage studies have contributed to this understanding. Many studies have been undertaken to classify the causes and types of errors, both intralingual and interlingual, chiefly on the basis of the different processes that were assumed to be involved. These processes include overgeneralization, simplification, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of restrictions on rules, false or wrong hypothesis, and error due to transfer of rules from L1 to L2. All these indicate active, cognitive mechanisms at work in learning, and therefore cannot be viewed in strictly behaviourist terms. Some errors might also be induced by wrong teaching. There are difficulties in classifying errors as there are sometimes multiple explanations. To some extent, however, the study of learners' errors reveals much about the process of learning.

3.6 KEYWORDS

Error: a systematic fault that is produced during the process of language learning.

Error analysis: the study and analysis of the errors made by second and foreign language learners, and also of developmental errors.

Interference/transfer: the influence of one language on the learning of another and application of rules from one language in the other.

Lapse: a mistake made by a learner when speaking or writing, which is caused by carelessness, tiredness, stress etc.

Mistake: an occasional, usually socially inappropriate choice, which can usually be rectified by a speaker.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Dulay Heidi, Burt Marina and Krashen Stephen (1973), *Language Two*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Susan M. Ervin-Tripp (1969), *Sociolinguistics*, Academic Press Inc. Published by Elsevier Inc.

Pit Corder, Stephen (1981), *Error analysis and interlanguage*, Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, William (1983), *Foreign and Second Language Learning: Language Acquisition Research and Its Implications for the Classroom*, Cambridge University Press.

3.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 The Structuralists - behaviourists believed that the learner's knowledge of L1 interfered with her/his learning of the L2 system, especially in those areas where the structures of L1 and L2 were dissimilar. This dissimilarity led to errors, as the learner failed to learn the new set of habits. These errors had to be eradicated immediately, before they became set habits, because for the behaviourists language learning was mere habit formation.
- 2 **Mistakes** are random errors or socially inappropriate forms. The learner is aware of the rule but randomly makes a 'mistake' which can be corrected by himself/herself.

Errors are grammatically incorrect forms and are a sure indication that the learner has not mastered the code of the second language.

Lapses are faults that can be best described as slips of the tongue or pen. They are not a matter of great concern as all of us, at one time or the other, make silly slips due to carelessness, sloppiness or just inadvertently.

Check Your Progress 2

Read Section 3.3

Check Your Progress 3

- 1
 - a. overgeneralization, addition of -ed suffix
 - b. omission, of 'a' before 'noise', may be due to transfer of L1 article system
 - c. incomplete application of rules
 - d. false hypothesis
 - e. overgeneralization of suffix -ness, ignorance of productivity constraint on suffixes
 - f. simplification
- 2 Do it yourself

UNIT 4 STRATEGIES OF LEARNING-2

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Communication Strategies
- 4.3 The Learner's Internal Syllabus
- 4.4 Conclusion
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Suggested Readings
- 4.7 Answers

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to enable you to understand various strategies used by learners which give us vital information about the process of learning. The Unit also sheds light on the learner's internal syllabus.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we focused on learners' errors. But learners do not only make errors. There is much else that they do in learning, including the use of a certain amount of correct language. Therefore we should consider the other strategies that learners use by asking the question:

What does a good learner do?

A good learner (Rubin 1975) :

- is prepared to take risks
- makes maximum use of opportunities to communicate in L2
- interacts with speakers of L2
- uses techniques of self-learning
- monitors own learning
- attends to errors by herself/himself

All the above are strategies that a good learner uses. Some of these are part of the mental or cognitive processes that go on in a learner's mind. Others are interactional situations created by the learner and other participants with whom the learner interacts in the course of learning. Both these are inter-related – the plans made by the learner are influenced by the situations and functions in which the learner is required to use the language, while the situations make cognitive demands on the learner which are processed in the learner's mind when the learner evolves strategies to deal with them.

Apart from role of error, and the above mentioned strategies, there are many others which can be seen as integral in the process of language learning.

4.2 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Learners learn language in order to express meaning and to communicate. When learners are engaged in the activity of conveying their communicative intentions, they may become aware that they do not have enough language to do so. They may anticipate that they will have difficulties. Accordingly, they will modify what they are trying to say, and make attempts of various kinds, and might even avoid communication. The latter attempt is not always to be viewed in a negative light, but rather in a sense of the learner's 'buying time' to work out what needs to be said. The learner does not know the language and yet wants to communicate his/her intention. In such a situation, the learner may try to modify an utterance, or use some alternative expression as a way of getting the meaning across. This comes from an awareness of the problem, and a response to it in one way or another.

This needs problem-solving strategies of various kinds, which can be called **communication strategies**. After the change in the awareness of the role of errors in language learning, attention turned to the way in which learners communicate in order to learn language. It has been recognized that the process of speech production that takes place in this way is itself at a higher level of awareness, though it is often difficult to distinguish between speech which is a spontaneous output reflecting the learner's interlanguage and that which is a result of a definite communicative strategy. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been considerable research on communication strategies, following upon an early defining of **communicative competence** by Dell Hymes (1972). This is competence which is not simply the knowledge of the language, but also knowledge of ways of communicating in the language in different kinds of social situations and contexts. Communicative competence is instrumental in both using the language as well as learning more and more of the language.

Communicative strategies are defined in various ways. According to Corder (1983), they are 'systematic techniques employed by a speaker to express meaning when faced with some difficulty'. This definition emphasizes the problem-solving aspect. This is echoed by Stern (1987) as 'techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language'. Tarone (1980) gives importance to the interactive aspect in saying that a communication strategy is 'a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures are not shared'. Faerch and Kasper (1983) say that these strategies are 'potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal'. Dornei and Scott (1997) give a composite view of the problem-solving and communicative aspect in the definition: 'A communicative strategy is every potentially intentional attempt to cope with any language-related problem of which the speaker is aware during the course of communication'.

The next task is to understand the various types of such strategies that learners employ. One of these communicative strategies is **adjustment**. The learner may realize that he/she doesn't have the required language to complete the intended message and may adjust the message, making it shorter and simpler, or slightly

different. There may be no error made because the learner plays safe and uses only the kind of items he/she knows and can use, whether it is a word or a sentence. A learner who is conscious about being accurate will use this strategy so that the danger of violating the norms of the language does not arise.

Another such strategy is **paraphrase**, which is a description of something in a round-about way, when a learner does not know the exact word. This is a suitable strategy for ensuring better accuracy as it may not necessarily lead to errors in the forms used. Learners also use **approximation**, which is the use of words which are close enough to convey meaning, even if they are not exact. These could be words which are general e.g. saying 'fruit' instead of 'strawberry', particularly if the fruit is of a kind that the learner is not familiar with. When they occur in context, such substitutes or approximate expressions can be understood, but may sometimes cause misunderstanding when the item is not present. In this case, it may sometimes be viewed as an error, somewhat similar to an error due to over-generalisation. For example, a learner may say 'drowner' instead of 'diver', taking a general meaning of 'going into the water' to make a word such as 'drowner' by applying a suffix 'er'. This is likely to cause misunderstanding and be perceived as an error.

Learners may also **create new words**, or phrases, which they think will convey the meaning, sometimes by literally translating an equivalent expression from their first language. For example, a learner may say: '*Light has gone*', as in Hindi '*Bijli gayi hai*' instead of 'there is a power cut' or 'electricity failure'. A new word may also be created in the second language itself, as for example happens in Anglo-Indian usage such as 'tiffin', 'hill station' etc, which are not translations, but coinages made at a certain time, (when the British were in India) and became widely accepted.

Borrowing from the first language is also another strategy, where a learner may use the known word from the first language rather than create a new one. This, when extended to phrases or full sentences, becomes **switching**, which is also a communicative strategy.

However, when learners are aware of the gaps and weaknesses in their knowledge of the language, a strategy that they use is to avoid situations where such language would be needed. For example, a learner may avoid speaking on or writing on a topic because he/she does not have the necessary vocabulary. This can be due to fear or hesitation. Whatever the reason, the **avoidance strategy**, as it may be called, helps the learner to avoid errors. But some may consider it as a negative strategy, since very little or no language is produced and the scope for further learning through self-correction and self-exposure is limited. Another strategy is **repair**, by which a learner changes something said earlier and tries to give the correct form as:

'they don't... they didn't want the people to go in the palace'

'he come...came back to the ship'

Finally, learners may use **non-linguistic resources** such as gestures, mime, etc. to convey meaning. This may become productive if the listener, in response to such gestures, provides some linguistic support e.g. may use a word in response to a learner pointing at something, and thereby the learner would learn the word that is needed. This is a useful strategy. In addition, a learner may signal that he/she is in difficulty and needs help, through gestures or hesitation.

This may also elicit the co-operation of the listener and work as a communicative strategy.

Description of communicative strategies. Bialystok (1990) pointed out that the strategies such as use of alternative forms, paraphrase or coinage cannot really be undertaken when the target language forms are not known or are unstable. While interaction does show some strategies in operation, it is more important to look at the concepts that the learner forms, or the **cognitive processes** underlying the use of strategies. This marks a shift away from product-oriented researches towards process-oriented researches. It is the understanding of cognitive and psycholinguistic dimensions of communication strategies, or, in other words, the deep structure of strategic language behaviour that is crucial.

In this, a cognitive component of conceptualisation is involved, which produces pre-verbal messages, which are then encoded into linguistic forms. In the conceptual stage, the concept is decomposed into its defining features, or a word sharing a number of semantic features with the original concept substituted. These processes may be analytic or holistic. In the case of analytic strategies, the speaker lists some of the features of the intended concept e.g.

‘talk bird’ or ‘bird that can talk’ for ‘parrot’

‘look like water’ for ‘liquid’

‘box for catching mouse’ for ‘mouse trap’.

Holistic strategies involve the selection of a different concept which is sufficiently similar to the original one, to convey the speaker’s intended meaning e.g.

‘table’ for ‘desk’

‘room’ for ‘office’

‘vegetable’ for ‘pumpkin’

‘look at TV’ for ‘watch TV’

These are to be distinguished from the linguistic strategies, which includes the syntactic, morphological and phonological rules that are used in L1, some knowledge of the rules of L2, and knowledge of similarities between the L1 and L2 (Poulisse, 1987). These linguistic strategies are further divided into two groups – morphological creativity and transfer strategies. In the first, the learner uses the known morphological forms in L2 to create new words which may serve as a comprehensible L2 word, e.g. ‘compitate’ for ‘compete’. In transfer, words or phrases that are close in both the languages may be transferred into each other e.g. as in Hindi, the learner may say /mai/ for /mei/ (the month), ‘below the tree’ for ‘under the tree’ (*peid ke neeche*).

In general, communication strategies, like errors, also tell us a lot about the interlanguage of the learner. They indicate the working of the cognitive language processing system. The conscious and intentional use of communicative strategies also indicates the difference between these and the behaviour that is unintentional e.g. pauses, or hesitation. There may be an optimal level of use of communication strategies, as studies have shown that learners who use a lot of communication strategies are often less intelligible. This may be due to the fact that the use of some strategies may involve language that becomes unclear or unrelated to the thought that is being intended.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 If a learner says 'scale' instead of 'ruler', or 'rubber' instead of 'eraser', what kind of strategy do you think he/she is using?

.....

- 2 If a learner says 'people stand at door' instead of 'guards', what kind of strategy do you think he/she is using?

.....

- 3 Is it always possible to distinguish between a clear error and a communicative strategy?

.....

- 4 Discuss the communicative strategies that the learner uses in order to be understood in the second language.

.....

4.3 THE LEARNER'S INTERNAL SYLLABUS

Though we know that learners creatively construct the rules which underlie the second language, and that these are active strategies, it is also true that each learner applies these strategies differently. While we can broadly predict the stages that learners are passing through by the kinds of errors they make at each stage, in specific terms each learner has an internal syllabus. **This internal syllabus consists of the natural strategies of the learner and it determines the learning path he/she will follow.**

The internal syllabus is different from the external syllabus which is given to the learner. In case of the external syllabus, the items to be learnt are placed in a sequence which the teacher or the syllabus-maker has made according to their perception of the most suitable way the learning should take place. This may conflict with the learner's internal syllabus. The learner may decide that a particular item or sequence is too difficult, or not required at that particular time and may rearrange the external syllabus, though not always in a conscious way. So there may be a difference between the *learning* sequence and the *teaching* sequence. But the learner's internal syllabus may not always be in conflict with, or over-ride the external syllabus. It may co-exist, in the learner's employment of strategies in order to process and internalize the given data.

Because of the way in which exercises are done in the classroom, the learner's performance is controlled in particular ways to produce the desired result. Learners produce only that language which is required. But when learners are placed in uncontrolled situations, where they have to use the language freely in order to communicate, the strategies come into play that show there is an internal syllabus at work, irrespective of what course of instruction is being given.

Check your progress 2

1 What is the 'internal syllabus'? Do you think it is present in every learner?

.....
.....
.....

2 Why is there a difference between the learning sequence and teaching sequence?

.....
.....
.....

4.4 CONCLUSION

We began with behaviorist explanations of the nature of language learning as a set of habit formation processes. This was opposed with the idea given by Chomsky of the innateness of language acquisition, and of the operation of the language acquisition device present in the minds of children which enables them to get linguistic knowledge without conscious attention to grammatical rules. Subsequently, more attention was given to research on the acquisition of the second language, and on the role of errors as part of the learner's interlanguage. Error analysis aimed at the detailed description of the latent language system. However, these approaches were product-oriented i.e. they were based on the production of language by the learner on which judgements regarding the stage of learning and of the interlanguage were made. Later research became more process-oriented, aimed at studying the underlying mechanisms, which lead to certain kinds of interlanguage. It was seen that input (that is, comprehensible input), and communicative interaction were important determinants in the process of acquisition. Thus, interlanguage came to be seen not just as an abstract system, but as a process of communicative interaction which may be continuously evolving in contexts of use and situations. This process may be undergone without any problem by procedural use of the interlanguage, or it may be seen by the learner in a problematic way, and it is in the second type of process that the learner takes recourse to strategies. A study of communication strategies thus aims to describe this strategic use of interlanguage. These communication strategies are devices which are consciously used, and procedures, verbal or non-verbal, which act as compensatory means for linguistic deficiency. They are enabling devices used by the learner and are generally well-received by listeners who are part of the discourse. The latter can see that the person who has less language is attempting to compensate or to find sufficient alternatives, and is inclined to provide more help so that communication can move forward.

The communicative strategies can be *conceptual* (which is analytical when it involves decomposing the concept into its defining features or using a semantically similar word corresponding to the original concept and holistic when it involves substituting a word of general semantic similarity with the original concept) or *linguistic* (manipulating the known linguistic knowledge such as in using morphological creativity to construct words).

Taken together, the processes of transfer, overgeneralization, transfer of training, communication strategies are the psycholinguistic processes that characterize language learning and are used by learners at various stages.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

What are the main insights into the nature of learning that we have obtained from the discussions in the foregoing units? These are:

Learning is both imitative and creative.

Learning is both conscious and subconscious.

There are natural sequences or stages in language learning.

Errors are signs of learning.

Learners possess an interim system, or interlanguage.

Learning can take place through a reduced system.

Learners make use of communicative strategies.

Learners have an internal syllabus.

For teachers, all the above insights are of extreme importance and have added to our knowledge of the nature of learning and the strategies used by learners in various stages of development of language.

4.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bialystok, E. *Communication Strategies* Oxford, Blackwell. 1990

Corder, S.P. 'Strategies in Communication' in Faerch and Kasper ed. *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication*, London, Longman. 1983. p. 15-19

Dornyei Z. and Scott, M.L. 'Strategic competence in a second language: Definitions and taxonomies' *Language Learning*, 48, p. 172-210

Hymes, Dell, 'On Communicative Competence' In J.B.Pride and Holmes, S. eds. *Sociolinguistics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin. 1972.

Poullisse, N. 'Communicative strategies in second language.' In the *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Vol.2, Oxford, Oxford University Press. p. 620-624.

Stern, H.H. *Fundamental Concepts in Language Teaching*. New York, Oxford University Press. 1987

Tarone E. and Yule, G. *Focus on the Language Learner*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 1989

Tarone, E. 'Interlanguage'. In *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* Vol. 4. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 1715-1719

4.7 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Conceptual, analytical
- 2 Conceptual, holistic
- 3 Think of some examples of communicative strategies that you are familiar with to help you answer this question.
- 4 Read Section 4.2. You need to discuss the following strategies – adjustment, paragraphs, approximation, creation of new words, borrowing from L1, avoidance and repair.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Internal syllabus consists of the natural strategies of the learner and it determines the learning path he/she will follow. Yes, all of us have an internal syllabus. This is most evident when learners are placed in uncontrolled situations.
- 2 The internal syllabus consists of the learner's own strategies and his/her own learning path. The external sequence consists of items that a teacher or syllabus-maker perceives as a suitable way of learning. There may be a mismatch between the two.