



APPLICABLE THEORY

Current research on first language acquisition supports several perspectives of cognitive theory as proposed by psychologists, linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and educators. Each perspective has its strengths and weaknesses, and in reality, each likely contributes to the successful acquisition of first languages. In my particular case, it is interesting that I did not acquire Cajun French as my parents and grandparents spoke the language, even though I was consistently exposed during the critical period. I only acquired the language to the extent that it was functional within my cultural group. This experience lends much credence to the social interaction theory.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Born to English speaking Americans in the 1970's, I acquired English naturally. However, I grew up in an isolated region in South Louisiana where I was exposed to Cajun French throughout my developmental years. Cajun French was the language of adults, but those of my generation spoke with a Cajun dialect that not only affected English phonology but also incorporated French vocabulary. French was always present, whether in folksongs, the kitchen, holidays, or significant events.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Junior high, high school, and college (1980-1990's) included intensive French studies. Instruction typically involved a traditional grammar-based approach using materials such as textbooks, workbooks, and French literature. Access to native speech was minimal, and listening to French prerecorded tapes or videos was a luxury. I developed an extensive vocabulary, sound grammar, and very good pronunciation which came easily. However, little to no communicative competence was acquired.

APPLICABLE THEORY

My French studies during upper school years were grammar-based from a learning viewpoint. I spent hours and hours reading lessons on verb conjugations and other structural aspects of the language while memorizing tons of vocabulary. Many upon many workbooks were diligently completed. While I could read novels in French, I still could not order a coffee in Quebec or a burger in Paris. This experience provides anecdotal evidence that a structural learning approach void of functional components will typically not result in effective communication necessary for real world application.



CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

BEHAVIORIST THEORY

Based on psychological theories of stimulus-response, imitation, and reinforcement and structural linguistics but does not account for creative utterances and comprehension, overgeneralizations, rate and order of acquisition, minimal input, language complexity, or lack of caretaker feedback.

IMITATION
REINFORCEMENT
BEHAVIORAL

COGNITIVE THEORY

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY: Child-focused theories centered on developmental stages where acquisition occurs independently of other cognitive functions.

SOCIAL INTERACTION: Environment-focused theories centered on communicative competence through contextual exposure and comprehensible input.

LINGUISTIC: Language-focused theories centered on innate knowledge of grammar and the capacity to acquire language through rule formation and pattern recognition.

CONNECTIONIST: Theory suggesting that language acquisition occurs through language exposure that forms associations and stimulates the formation of neural connections.

KEYS TO UNLOCKING LANGUAGE

PHONOLOGY: Phonemes (40) ♦ Vowels (16): Complex system of 9 short (reducible), 5 long (diphthongs), 1 reduced (ə), and 1 r-controlled ♦ Consonants (24): 3 stop pairs (voiced/voiceless), 3 nasals, 4 fricative pairs (voiced/voiceless) and 1 glottal fricative, 1 affricate pair (voiced/voiceless), 2 approximants, and 2 glides ♦ Aspirated and non-aspirated stops are allophonic ♦ Phoneme /t/ has 6 allophonic variations ♦ Phonemes /d/ and /ð/ ♦ Dark [ɫ] occurs after vowels ♦ Complex stress system.

PHONOTACTICS: Syllable: (C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C) ♦ Syllable-initial 3-C blends restricted to /s/ + voiceless stop + approximant/glide ♦ Closed syllabication very common.

MORPHOLOGY: Analytic ♦ 8 inflectional suffix morphemes ♦ Simple number, gender and person agreement ♦ No classifiers ♦ Simple S-V agreement system but complex auxiliary system.

SYNTAX: Strict SVO word order ♦ Prepositions and word order primary indicators of syntactical relationships ♦ No postposition particles ♦ Modifiers precede nouns ♦ Definite and indefinite articles ♦ Subject required.

ORTHOGRAPHY: Alphabetic (Roman) ♦ 26 characters organized linearly from left to right with word boundary spacing ♦ No diacritics ♦ Spelling is very inconsistent.

VOCABULARY: 25% Germanic (higher percentage for common words) ♦ 58% Latin (esp. academic) ♦ Greek 5%

PHONOLOGY: Phonemes (31) ♦ Vowels (10): Simple system of 5 short and 5 diphthongs ♦ Consonants (21): 3 stop pairs (voiced/voiceless), 3 nasals, 4 fricatives (voiceless), 1 affricate pair (voiced/voiceless), 4 approximants, and 2 glides ♦ Phonemes /t/ and /d/ more dental than English ♦ Two /r/ approximants (flapped and trilled) ♦ Allophonic [d] and [ð], Simple stress system.

PHONOTACTICS: Syllable: (C)(C)V(C) ♦ Syllable-initial blend restricted to stop/fricative + approximant/glide ♦ Mixture of open and closed syllabication.

MORPHOLOGY: Synthetic ♦ Extensive number, gender, and person agreement ♦ No classifiers ♦ Complex S-V agreement system.

SYNTAX: Somewhat strict SVO word order ♦ Prepositions and word order primary indicators of syntactical relationships ♦ No postposition particles ♦ Modifiers precede nouns but adjectives usually follow nouns ♦ Definite and indefinite articles ♦ Subject pronoun optional.

ORTHOGRAPHY: Alphabetic (Roman) ♦ 29 characters (2 digraphs) organized linearly from left to right with word boundary spacing ♦ Diacritic markings ♦ Spelling is very consistent.

VOCABULARY: Primarily Latin

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS



PHONOLOGY: Phonemes (27) ♦ Vowels (21): 8 simple/compound, 13 diphthongs (glide + vowel) and 1 unstable diphthong ♦ Consonants (19): 4 stop triplets (plain/aspirated/tense) ♦ 3 nasals, 1 fricative pair (plain/tense) and 1 glottal fricative, 1 approximant, and 2 glides ♦ Voiced and voiceless stops, fricatives, and affricates are allophonic ♦ Plain, aspirated, and tense stops are phonemic ♦ Plain and tense fricatives /s/ and /ss/ are phonemic ♦ No dark [ɫ]

PHONOTACTICS: Syllable: (C)(Glide)V(C) ♦ Syllable-final consonant clusters reduced to 1 consonant sound ♦ Syllable-final consonants often assimilate ♦ Bright, dark, and neutral vowels restricted to vowel harmony (no bright + dark vowels combinations) ♦ Mixture of open and closed syllabication.

MORPHOLOGY: Agglutinative ♦ Honorific (6 levels) ♦ Little number, gender, or person agreement ♦ Classifiers ♦ No S-V agreement.

SYNTAX: Basic SOV but highly flexible word order with V-final or ADJ-final ♦ No prepositions ♦ Postposition particles primary indicators of syntactical relationships ♦ Modifiers precede nouns ♦ Situation-oriented (omission of sentence components) ♦ No articles.

ORTHOGRAPHY: Alphabetic (Hangul) and some Chinese characters ♦ 24 characters organized into syllable blocks and usually written horizontally from left to right with syllable boundary spacing ♦ Spelling is somewhat consistent ♦ Syllables restricted to 2-5 characters with requisite C-V ♦ No diacritics.

VOCABULARY: Native 35% ♦ Sino-Korean 60% ♦ Loanwords 5% (90% English)



APPLICABLE THEORY

My exposure to Spanish later in life, beyond the critical period for language acquisition, could be best described as a rationalist orientation with an acquisition viewpoint. I was immersed in Spanish with little explicit knowledge of the language, yet I still developed sound phonological and phonotactic awareness and an extensive vocabulary. My previous exposure to French probably influenced acquisition. This experience supports Chomsky's theory that humans have an innate ability to acquire language without direct instruction. However, I did not become competent in Spanish which supports hypotheses such as comprehensible input and output production which were lacking in my experience.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

During college (1990's) I lived with native Spanish speakers for 5 years and took some advanced Spanish classes. Though I had little need to use Spanish, I acquired very good pronunciation skills. Still today, I have a very good "feel" for the language in terms of its phonology and phonotactics. However, I did not develop much communicative competence even in this immersive environment. Currently, I work with Spanish speaking high schoolers and can use my Spanish skills to make connections and facilitate sessions.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Until this class, I had never been exposed to Korean. As a 44-year old distant student, it was quite a challenge. Though we focused on thematic and functionally driven lessons, there was little opportunity to practice the language with native speakers. I appreciated the communicative aspect of the language exposure, but as an non-traditional student from the old grammar translation days, I did feel somewhat lost without a systematic lesson plan that addressed language structure such as syntax and morphology.

APPLICABLE THEORY

My exposure to Korean this semester was the first time approaching second language acquisition from a functional perspective. I felt somewhat reluctant without my grammar crutch. Also, I could feel Schumann's theory on social distance at play. However, studying the language through thematic units, such as shopping and restaurant situations, provided much more relevance to the information and in turn positively influenced affective filters such as motivation and engagement. This experience supports meaningful communication as a critical key to second language acquisition.

KRASHEN'S 5 HYPOTHESES

AFFECTIVE FILTER: Factors such as stress, motivation, or engagement can positively or negatively affect language acquisition.

INPUT: Language acquisition is maximized when input is scaffolded just beyond the learner's comprehension abilities (i + 1), also known as comprehensible input.

NATURAL ORDER: Aspects of L1 and L2 such as sounds, morphemes, and words are generally acquired in a language specific order.

MONITOR: Language learners can effectively monitor usage based on explicitly learned rules. Over-use or under-use of monitoring can result in adverse outcomes.

LEARNING/ACQUISITION: Learning is a conscious process of developing language through explicit instruction while acquisition is a subconscious process through meaningful exposure to the target language.

RECEPTION-BASED

LONG'S INTERACTION HYPOTHESIS

In addition to comprehensible input, learners require output in order to evaluate communication, test and negotiate their production, and make adjustments that facilitate language acquisition.

PRODUCTION-BASED

SCHUMANN'S THEORY ON SOCIAL DISTANCE

Language acquisition is less successful when the social distance between cultural groups increases. Examples of factors that increase social distance are length of stay, group closeness and self-sufficiency, and cultural differences.

CRITICAL PERIOD HYPOTHESIS

If language is acquired before the age of six, little to no accent will be prevalent. After this critical period, language acquisition places more emphasis on learning. Research suggests several factors which may account for this phenomenon, such as neurological, cognitive, affective characteristics, and fossilization.

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GRAMMAR: Rules that govern language form and determine its acceptability per conventional standards. Primary subcategories include syntax, morphology, and phonology. Grammar works hand-in-hand with semantics and pragmatics.

SEMANTICS: Study of language meaning whether at the word, discourse, or other levels of language usage.

PRAGMATICS: Study of the contextualization of language function, its influence on semantics, and its compliance with society's conversational conventions.

SYNTAX: Study of the organization of words into structural units such as sentences, clauses, and phrases.

MORPHOLOGY: Study of the structure of words and their meaningful units called **MORPHEMES**. Units may be described as free or bound. Bound units are called **AFFIXES**, (prefixes, infixes, or suffixes), and can be categorized as inflectional or derivational where the former changes the part of speech and the latter does not.

PHONOLOGY: Study of the sound systems of individual languages and their meaningful units of sound. Phonemic units, referred to as **PHONEMES** and written within forward slashes, are mental representations of meaningfully contrasting sounds. Variations of phonemes that are not contrasted within a specific language are referred to as **ALLOPHONES** and written within brackets.

PHONETICS: Study of the physical properties of sounds as used and contrasted across all languages. Individual sounds are generally depicted using the **INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (IPA)**, a set of symbols that represent the physical characteristics of a sound production.

PHONOTACTICS: Study of phoneme dependences, i.e. rules that govern and restrict sound combinations within specific languages.

ORTHOGRAPHY: Study of a language's writing system including spelling, characters, and all ancillary aspects of writing that infer meaning to the reader (e.g. underlining, bolding, punctuation, indentation).

GRAMMAR MODELS

STRUCTURAL: A traditional approach to language study in which learners break the language into its basic units such as parts of speech and sentence components and examine how these parts are organized to build language from a systematic, bottom-up progression. **COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**, or the ability to use language appropriately within varying social contexts, is often neglected under this model.

MENTAL FACULTY: Championed by Chomsky and Krashen, this biological approach to language study focuses on humans' unique ability to acquire language. A subconscious mental resource within which innate universal grammar is housed, called a **LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DEVICE (LAD)**, allows humans to acquire language naturally with minimal **COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT**, meaningful and understandable language that stimulates the LAD to access and formulate rules of grammar.

FUNCTIONAL RESOURCES: Proponents of this social approach to language study, such as Halliday, Derewianka, and Vygotsky, suggest that the purpose of language is to create meaning. Therefore, language acquisition will flourish in an environment of meaningful social interactions. People *do* language.

"To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture."
Frantz Fanon

"What the survival of threatened languages means, perhaps, is the endurance of dozens, hundreds, thousands of subtly different notions of truth."
Mark Abley

OPENING DOORS