

Fundamentals of language Acquisition

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Lecture 032

Lec 32: parallel between first and second language acquisition

Welcome back. We will start with Lecture 2 now. Lecture 2 is within module 7. In module 7, we are looking at second language acquisition from various perspectives. In the first lecture, we looked at the definitional aspects of what second language acquisition is, what the important domains are, and how they are typically studied; that brief overview we gave. And then we also looked at the aspect of how second language acquisition was initially viewed, what the problems were, and later on what changes occurred.

Now, let us again have a very brief overview of the parallels and differences between first and second language acquisition as we see in the literature. Now, as the name suggests, there are two different things: first language and second language acquisition, which are different from a number of perspectives. They are different because they are, of course, first and second language acquisition. But then let us look at some of the differences and some parallels.

Parallels are fewer, differences are more, but let us just start. So, the first, of course, the order is that the first language is learned in the beginning, and the second language follows. So, the first language is the one that the child is exposed to since before birth, as I was telling you, because we have already seen this in the prenatal stage. Also, in their phonological development, they start to understand sounds and distinguish between sounds, and so on. So, that is how early the first language is learned.

Second language makes its entry much later. In fact, in order to be called a second

language, a child must learn it after 3 years. So, even if you learned it in childhood, you are still learning it. So, there is a good gap of more than three years between these. You know that the first language has a crucial initial level advantage.

This is very simplistic and very obvious. Then the second language may or may not be spoken by the parents. So, typically this used to be the case; this was more common before that L1 was most of the time spoken by the parents. So, often most parents, but sometimes one of the parents, might not be speaking the first language. So, across groups and scenarios, we have seen that primarily the mother will be; that is why the term was "mother tongue."

" Of course, society changed and the situation changed. It was called the mother tongue because it was the language that the mother spoke. So, broadly, the L1 is the language of the home, the parents, or the primary caregivers, and all. L2 may or may not be spoken, so often L2 is spoken by other people outside the home, or maybe by a caregiver or somebody else who is not a parent. So, the effort to learn might be a hallmark of at least learning a second language in a tutored environment.

So, because your L1 is spoken by your parents and your primary caregiver, you do not need to make any effort to learn it; it is there in the environment, but the L2 will be learned with some amount of effort. Thirdly, everyone learns to speak their L1. Of course, in the case of atypical children, the situation is different, but for all neurotypical children, L1 is, you know, taken for granted that they will learn L1 and everybody masters it. So, that is where the native speaker's competence comes into the picture. So, if you are a native speaker of X, you will be a master speaker of X.

That is at least prime; the general wisdom is that. Of course, there are differences within that as well, but we are not getting there yet. Primarily, if whichever language is your mother tongue, you are expected to be a very good speaker of that language. But that is not how L2 works. In fact, L2 proficiency and the factors affecting it are domains of study.

That itself tells you that learning a second language does not guarantee being able to speak the language very well. So, this is another very crucial point to discuss and research as well. So, which is why it is not a question of whether a child will learn the complex grammar of their L1. But it is always a question of whether the child will learn the complex grammar of L2, whether they will master L2, how they will master it, what the trajectory is, and so on and so forth. L2 proficiency is, in fact, a matter of study.

Again, acquiring L1 has no prior information stored in the brain. So, tabula rasa, you are beginning from 0; there is no pre-existing language in your system from which you might take help or which might even create problems for your language learning; nothing is there. So, you are just beginning. So, that is the case with L1. But in the case of L2, there is already another language waiting there.

Your L1 is already there by the time your L2 comes in. So, there are these; that is why L2 learning and L2 acquisition are often studied in terms of the impact of L1 on L2, the transfer theory, and the contrastive analysis, all of which are based on this very idea that because there is a pre-existing language already, it might have some kind of give and take. So that is another very crucial aspect. So, conversely, the cognitive abilities of L2 learners are more fine-tuned than those of L1 learners owing to the age factor. So, when we talk about the second language being learned when there is already another language, there is another factor that is co-occurring, which is cognitive development.

By the time you learn your L2, your cognitive development will have already reached a certain stage. Depending on age, it will be a different kind of stage: stage 1, stage 2, stage 3, or whatever. But L1, when you are learning, is also beginning your cognitive development. So, they co-develop, which is not the case with L2. That is another very important difference.

Yet another area is that of pronunciation; these are the simplistic, more readily visible, and readily understandable domains of difference across L1 and L2, specifically in the domain of pronunciation. It is more notable among adult learners; child learners of a second language typically do not have much of a problem there, but adult learners of a second language, you will find, it is very easy to understand from their pronunciation that they are not native speakers of that language. which means that often L2 learners are not able to achieve the same level of proficiency as native speakers. You might be proficient, but what is proficiency? Let us take a small detour. Proficiency does not just mean that you are able to speak; of course, it primarily refers to being able to speak flawlessly and grammatically, but it also includes what is called accent in everyday language, which is basically a matter of pronunciation—it's phonology.

How do you master the phonology of L2? Do you or do you not? Adult learners often do not. So, your L1 phonology will show through somewhere or another. For example, if in

some languages the "o" sound is more prominent, in others the "o" sound is more prominent, while some languages do not have the schwa at all. So, in languages that require schwa, you might replace it if you are a speaker of an o-dominant language; you will replace the schwa with o. So, the vowel will be replaced.

So, these kinds of things are what is typically called pronunciation. So, that is where that impact is also very easily visible as in audible. So, it is clear that this is on the surface. So, pronunciation is another domain. Similarly, many other comparisons can be made.

Now, in terms of structure and its acquisition, there are several studies pointing out similarities and differences. So, on the one hand, the differences that we discussed are more, you know, commonsensical types, but on the other hand, in a more scientific way, in a more academically rigorous sense, the structures of the different languages, L1 and L2, and the acquisition of those structures have also been studied in terms of trying to find out the similarities and differences. This is again a very vast and rich area of research. So, we will look at only a couple of notions in order to get a broad idea. So, first we will look at the morphology and then we will look at a little bit of understanding of syntax.

In terms of morphology, we have already seen the stages of morphological development in children. So, we have seen that first language acquisition can be understood primarily through two different theoretical standpoints, the nativist and the constructivist. Both theories have tried to justify and explain how the first language morphology is learned, what the stages are, why we have those stages, and the errors that are present. So, in children acquiring their first language, we have seen that across different languages there are certain kinds of similarities. And this is utilized; this is explained in terms of universal grammar as the reflection of the underlying grammar.

Because every language has a similar kind of universal grammar, only the principles and parameters; certain kinds of parameter setting are to be done. Hence, broadly speaking, you have similarities across languages in terms of the stages of development. So, that is one. But we have also seen that there are some differences in certain cases that do not really fall very neatly into place with respect to this kind of standpoint, and we have discussed that as well. The comparison between L1 and L2 acquisition also takes the same kind of approach as the nativist, which is the universal grammar approach, versus the functionalist approach or the creative construction approach, and so on.

So, on the one hand, there are similarities that are explained in terms of sharing the same underlying grammar, universal grammar, or the language acquisition device. On the other hand, we have L1 influencing the acquisition of L2 through contrastive analysis and so on.

So, finding parallels, there have been studies starting way back in the 1960s. So, Corder's study has been very influential. The landmark study it's arguably the most important in beginning a series of investigations into the parallels between L1 and L2.

Are there parallels, and if so, what are they? If not, why aren't they there? So, this has actually been a steady line of research for a very long time, and we can trace it back all the way to Corder. Following his study, L2 interlanguage studies discussed a number of similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition. For example, morpheme order studies have been particularly important. Within Burt and Dulay's studies, I have quoted them here because of their immense contribution. So, during this time, they studied this through morpheme order studies.

They were inspired in turn by Roger Brown's work on first-language acquisition. We have already looked at Roger Brown's sequence of morphemes that children learn. So, we have seen the order discussed by both Cazden and Roger Brown. Roger Brown's study was based on those three children: Adam, Eve, and Sarah. So, on the basis of that, he put forward the pattern of acquisition it's quoted here again.

We have seen this before in the morphology section. So, this kind of parallel was later corroborated by many other researchers. So, Brown's study came out in '73, and many other studies following that, for example, De Villiers, corroborated that this kind of sequence actually exists. So, with 21 English-speaking children, they found that most of the time this kind of sequence was maintained. However, one important aspect that de Villiers pointed out was with respect to the contracted and uncontracted forms.

There were some differences that they found which were not as Brown reported. So, in terms of L2 acquisition researchers following Corder and others proposed that learners errors might be essentially similar to that of L1. So, we have already seen the kind of mistakes or errors that children make when they are learning morphology. The idea was that, whatever studies that followed the Corder's study, proposed that L2 acquisition might throw up a similar kind of errors. So, initial studies in this regard mainly contested the contrastive analysis findings because contrastive analysis was primarily looking at the input of L1 on L2 learning.

So, the initial studies that tried to look at the similarities between an L1 and L2 were busy debunking the contrastive analysis findings. But later they streamlined the domain, and as

I said, Burt and Dulay's work. They studied a large number of children. For example, in one particular study, 145 Spanish children were learning English in the U.

S. They looked at language acquisition, the acquisition of morphemes, using what was called the bilingual syntax measure created by them in 1973. And this study took a slightly more nuanced look at the types of errors that they had. For example, they had three different kinds of errors: developmental, interference, and unique. So, the interference was only 3 percent of the errors and because of this, they said that this is not because L1 is having an impact on L2, as the error is very low. Based on these findings, they actually created the idea of creative construction theory, which suggests that certain aspects of language are learned, while a second language is learned independently as a separate standalone process.

Anyway, so this is one of the very important contributions of their studies back in the 70s. Then, in another study by the same group, they had 250 Spanish and Chinese-speaking children. They wanted to check if the same kind of pattern is found across different language groups, such as Spanish and Chinese. They looked at 11 functors or morphemes, 9 of them the same as Brown and 2 extra; those extras are the pronoun case and the long plural, resulting in 11 different kinds of morphemes and their acquisition as L2 by Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking children, Spanish L1 and Chinese L1. And they also used a very sophisticated methodology for that time for scoring and tackling individual variation because each child is different from the other.

So, taking care of all of these, they used a very good methodology and came out with the result that an almost identical order exists for Spanish and Chinese children, both of whom were learning English. So this is the order he gave, I mean this study gave; this is the child L2 morpheme order as per the findings of Burt and Dulay. So starting with pronouns, cases, articles, and so on and so forth. So, of all the 11 that they studied, this is the order. There were various counterarguments in spite of a very strong methodological position.

The study was actually heavily criticized for the methodology itself, but then another set of researchers said that despite the problems and shortcomings, there are certain things that we can probably take forward from here, and I quote, "despite admitted limitations in some areas, the morphine studies provide strong evidence that they exhibit common accuracy/acquisition orders." So, in terms of the acquisition of inflectional morphology, they do have some kind of similarity across these studies and among these children that have been studied. Of course, some of the arguments were good enough, and then the group actually had a follow-up study, and they also responded to many of the criticisms. I will add those papers in the references. So, in a follow-up study, this group further refined the order and proposed a natural order of L2 acquisition, and now they propose it like this:

there are, you know, boxes; there are groups of morphemes that are learned first, followed by another group, followed by another group.

Not individual morphemes; they are not now talking about individual morphemes, but there is a natural order in which groups of morphemes are acquired. That is how they proposed it in a later study carried out in 1977. So, these boxes are again chronologically ordered. So, this is learned first. So, by the time a child is able to, for example, master the past and irregular past forms, then you can be sure that they have already figured out the morphemes in the first box and so on.

So, one after another, they did not really specify the order within each box. So, that is how they followed up. However, L2 orders are not the same as L1 orders. So, that is our primary lesson to take away from this: though they found a similarity across different L1 speakers learning L2 in terms of how they acquire their morphology and how they acquire their different kinds of morphemes, that order is not exactly the same as the order found in L1 acquisition; that is the crucial difference here. So, while the similarity of patterns within L1 acquisition points towards some underlying mechanism, the same within L2 acquisition may also point towards a similar kind of conclusion.

However, there are distinctions between L1 and L2. Now, this distinction, why does this distinction exist? There are different kinds of theories for that, as well. So, for example, one reason could be that they are substantially distinct mechanisms for learning L1 and L2. Because L1 and L2 are different, the learning mechanisms might also differ between these two languages, which could be one obvious kind of explanation. Another explanation that has been put forward is that an identical language-making capacity is accessible to both the L1 and L2 processes and that these differences are basically due to additional factors.

That additional factor might be many things. It can be the L1; it can be the language environment; it can be many things. So, it is probably not about not having the same kind of structure. They both have, both L1 and L2 acquisition have access to the same kind of underlying mechanism, but something else is happening. These are the two kinds of explanations that have been given. Moving on to syntax, one of the areas that has been studied extensively is called the syntax of negation.

How the negative marking, where the neg part comes in the structure, has been studied extensively. So, this has been studied both in L1 and L2, and hence it is easy to compare L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition with respect to this. Three universal stages of the development of negative constructions have been proposed.

So, these are the three stages. This is given by Wode (1977). This is based on findings primarily from English and other European languages. So, that has to be kept in mind. These are the stages of learning the syntax of negation in terms of the various kinds of languages, including various kinds of European languages such as English, French, and others. Now, subsequent research has also corroborated these findings from other languages. The initial results came primarily from English, but eventually, other European languages were also tested, and they found the same kind of pattern.

Now, coming to second language acquisition, which is our primary focus here. There was, of course, the question of whether the similar pattern would be noticed. Just like we looked at the morphology in L1, where there is a particular pattern, do L2 learners use the same kind of pattern in morphology? The same question asked here is whether there is a similar pattern in those three stages of learning negation in L2 as well. So, data from English as L2 suggests the same acquisition sequence within L2 learning groups. So, all the children learning English as their L2 were found to have the same kind of sequence in terms of learning the syntax of negation, So, this was found for both the child and the adult L2 learner.

So, these are the stages with respect to how the syntax of negation was mastered by both children and adult L2 learners when they were learning English as L2. Now, subsequently, the other languages were also studied; one influential study, for example, looked at Swedish as L2. From different kinds of language backgrounds, they looked at how learning Swedish, whether they have the same kind of pattern or not, turns out that they also have a similar pattern. So, the overall finding from a number of languages as L2 is that negation is initially placed pre-verbally. Whenever they have to put it in a post-verbal position, if required by the target system, it is first acquired with auxiliaries and the copula.

So, this is the pattern that is typically followed. Of course, there are long discussions here; I am not getting into that, but you get the idea that whether it is English as L2 or Swedish as L2, a similar kind of pattern seems to be followed within those groups. But the more important thing for us is that this sequence, which is prevalent across languages, whether it is English or Swedish, is not the same as the pattern in L1, which is our primary goal to

find out. So, that is not here. So, the L1 sequence of learning negation and the L2 sequence of learning negation in syntax—syntactically, how they learn, how to put the negation, and where to put it—there seems to be a difference. So, to sum up, of course, we can go on and on; this is a very interesting domain of research itself, but we have to sum up because this is not the focus.

So, to sum up, we will discuss the developmental stages of L2 acquisition in detail later in the module, taking up various factors: social, neurological, psychological, and all that. But based on the discussion thus far, we can safely assume that there are a number of differences between L1 and L2 acquisition, structurally as well as otherwise. So structurally, we saw that both in terms of morphology acquisition and syntax acquisition, there are important differences, even though within the group, within L1 acquisition and within L2 acquisition, there are similarities; there is the same pattern. But across L1 and L2, there are differences. So, if you are learning English as L1 versus learning English as L2, the sequence of learning the same morphological structures or the same syntactic structures will be different.

At the same time there is a shift in focus from comparing bilinguals to monolinguals, or let us say comparing first language acquisition to second language acquisition; that kind of comparison is now not very popular. The focus has shifted to looking at bilingualism itself and second language acquisition itself because there is a large amount of variation within second language acquisition research itself. So, different kinds of factors that we already talked about are now getting more attention as opposed to comparing L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition. So, this is where we complete Lecture 2 of Module 7. Thank you.