

Fundamentals of language Acquisition

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Week 07

Lecture 034

Lec 34: Functional Approaches

Welcome back. We are now at Lecture 4 of Module 7. We are discussing the theories of SLA. We started with the early approaches of contrastive analysis and then also had a brief discussion on error analysis, interlanguages, the monitor model, and universal grammar. So, now we will move on to the functional approaches. So, this is another set of approaches toward understanding second language acquisition.

So, the functional approach is different from both the structuralist and the generativist perspectives. In structuralism, we talked about the contrastive analysis, which was dominated by the structuralist and behaviorist theories, while the other theories were primarily based on universal grammar or the innateness hypothesis to various degrees. But now the functional approach is different from both of them. And the traces of the functional approach can be traced all the way back to the Prague School of Linguistics.

Here, the emphasis is not on the structure but on the informational content of the utterances. The focus here is slightly different in terms of what is uttered, what is conveyed, what the information part is, and what the information structure within the utterances is; that is what is important because communication is functional. So, the function of language is to communicate. So, what we communicate, where we communicate, and with whom we communicate—all of that will have an impact on how we learn our language; that is what my primary idea here is. So, the function of language is more important than the underlying rules or the kind of structure that you have.

So, because language is primarily a system of communication. So, there are predominantly four different strands of principles, or let us say paradigms, within the functional approach. So, it is not a homogeneous kind of system. There are multiple ways of looking at the same thing, but the baseline is that looking at language as a tool and as a communicative tool

serves the purpose of communication, which seems to play an important role in how language learning progresses. So, systemic linguistics, functional typology, function-to-form mapping, and information organization are the four different ways in which the functional approach has been understood.

Systemic linguistics was proposed by Halliday. The main idea here was that language structure needed to be studied in accordance with its context of use. Where are you using it? Because language, in this case, as far as Halliday is concerned, is a meaning-making sort of process, a meaning generation process. So what you say, why you say it, and what you want to convey is the crux of the entire thing here. So, he says that according to the purpose and where you are using the language, you may have a list of options, and depending on that, you will be using the language.

So, to quote him, he says that "learning a language is learning how to mean". So, meaning is central here because when you are trying to communicate, you have to mean something; if you do not mean anything, and if you speak like "colourless green ideas sleep furiously," you are not conveying any meaning. So, that is an important distinction; here, meaning is the important thing. So, the goal of the learner is not to master rules but to acquire the meaning potential. This is what he primarily said.

So, how do you acquire the meaning potential? How do you understand the different ways in which certain kinds of meanings can be conveyed in this particular target language? So, the pragmatic functions of the language are what is at the core of language acquisition when it comes to our L2. So these are the pragmatic functions that he talked about. These are relevant for L1 and L2. It started with L1, and they all can be utilized for L2 as well. So the pragmatic functions are instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, representational, and so on.

So, instrumental is basically when language is used as a means of getting things done, not strictly in the sense of a speech act, but typically you need to get something done by using language. So, you are using it as a tool. Similarly, regulatory measures to regulate others' behavior, interactional use of language in interactions between the self and others, and so on. So, a list of pragmatic functions that are at the root of using language initially started with L1 acquisition. And then he says that this theory states that the same kind of functions can be utilized for bilingualism as well when you are learning your second language, because you are simply multiplying the similar kind of meaning potential.

So, based on this paradigm, mastering linguistic structures in the developmental process reflects the functions that language serves. So, what is the function out of that long list of functions? What is the function that your language serves? that will decide the kind of

structure a person is using. So, if you recall, in the previous lecture, we talked about depending on what the goal is. If your goal is to be a tour guide and you are trying to learn the language of the tourists in order to be hired by them, that is one kind of use. So, as a result, your developmental processes will be different compared to someone learning a language to be able to read scholarly articles in that language.

So, that is the difference he makes. The language used will reflect the developmental stages of language structure. So, their development is closely related to the social and personal needs they are used to conveying. Then, applied to the SLA context, the model sees L2 acquisition as an addition of meaning potential. So, meaning potential, as in what are the different ways you can use it.

So, when you are learning another language, you are adding the meaning potential. So, to quote him, Saville Troike's second language acquisition is "largely a matter of learning new linguistic forms to fulfill the same functions as those already acquired and used in L1 within a different social milieu". So, you are learning another set of forms to utilize for the already existing meanings, or let us say pragmatic functions, that you already have in place. Your L1 has already created all those different, you know, pragmatic functions. Now you are learning another language, and you are adding forms not only to those pragmatic functions, but the new language might help you add some more meaning potential.

So, you are basically expanding your meaning potential while learning another language because ultimately that is the goal of language. So, that is what this approach talks about regarding systemic linguistics. Then we move on to functional typology. The typology, as many of you might already be aware, is the domain of linguistics where we compare among the languages of the world. So, you know we classify languages depending on, let us say, the different kinds of languages in the world; we look at the features of each of them, different kinds of features, and the distribution of those features.

Based on that analysis and those understandings, we classify languages into different groups; that is what typology does. So, when we are talking about functional typology, it basically integrates the consideration of language structure, meaning, and use. So, typically, when you are looking at typology as a subdiscipline within linguistics, we look at the typological understanding of the languages of the world; we are examining the structure, meaning, and other properties like this. But when you call it functional typology, we are also looking at use because the entire functional paradigm within SLA is about using the language. So, applied to SLA, this method explains why some L2 features are more difficult to learn than others and why some elements of L1 transfer to L2 while others do not.

Because we are looking at the L1 and L2 distinction in terms of certain grammatical features, certain uses of those grammatical features, and so on. So, on the basis of that understanding, a thorough understanding of the similarities and distinctions among languages across languages will tell us why certain L2 features are more difficult to learn and in which cases the L1 to L2 transfers are possible and in which cases they are not. In order to get there, there is an important concept of markedness. This is important within this domain to understand what is transferred and which concepts are more difficult to learn. So the idea is that, based on the markedness principle, some features are marked and some features are unmarked.

Now, what is unmarked? Unmarked is the category of features that are more frequently used than a contrasting element. So, basically, this is more expected. Let us say the /-s/ marking in the English language is a plural marker. So, having a plural marker as an inflection of the main root word is an unmarked property. So, this is what is used in many languages.

So, anything that is a structural property and is used most commonly, most frequently found, and more expected is called unmarked. And those things that are less expected are called "marked." Now, they can apply to any domain within the language structure. So, any level. So, for example, it can be in phonology, vocabulary, syntax, or discourse; all of these things might have their marked and unmarked properties.

So, in the case of morphology, we just talked about the /-s/ marking; in the case of sound, let us say certain sounds might have certain phonological properties that might be unmarked, while certain features might be marked, and so on. For example, let us say that in the case of phonology, we can talk about the syllable structure. So, one of the most common syllable structures is CV. The CV structure is the common structure. But there you can also have CCV, or you can also have triple, three consonants followed by one vowel.

So, this will be a marked structure; this will be an unmarked kind of structure. So, let us call it unmarked and this is marked. Why is it marked? Having three consonants followed by one vowel to create a syllable is comparatively less common. It is not that they do not exist; they do exist, but they are less common. But CV structure is more common even for the child when they start using some kind of language-like structure; this also comes in a CV format. So that is why it is unmarked; it is very, very prevalent.

So, let us say any kind of language you take; you will find a CV structure. But not all languages allow a complex structure like a complex triple of three consonants followed by one vowel. For example, Polish might have it, or some other language like Russian might have it, but not many others. Indian languages do have words, but even when we do have, let us say in an Indian language, we have a word called 'stree'.

So, we have a word like this. So, you have C, C, C, and then followed by a V. But even in this case, the number of such words is less. In Hindi also, this structure is allowed, but even then, it is less common. So, this is one case of the unmarked versus marked distinction in the domain of phonology. Similarly, you might have many others in other domains as well.

So, vocabulary as well as syntax, discourse, and so on. So, unmarked elements are expected to be learned before the marked ones. In LA, second language acquisition also, this happens. So, the same applies to L2, which is understandable because those features of a language, be it at whichever level, those that are more common are typically learned first, followed by the slightly more complex ones, and eventually the marked ones will be learned later. So this is applicable for L1 as well as in the case of L2.

Unmarked properties of L2 would be easier to learn than the marked ones. There is a concept called the markedness differential hypothesis proposed by Eckman that states unmarked features of L1 are more likely to be transferred to L2. So, there are two ideas that are part of this entire approach. There is a distinction between the marked and unmarked. So, which features are more difficult to learn and which features are easier to learn? So, that is answered by the marked unmarked principle.

If it is unmarked, it will be learned easily. If it is marked, it will be learned more difficult in the case of L2. And which ones get transferred? So, the markedness differential hypothesis says that unmarked properties are more likely to be transferred from L1 to L2. Now, we move on to form-to-function mapping. This is yet another approach within functionalism.

So, the acquisition of both L1 and L2 involves a process of grammaticalization. Now, the one-to-one mapping of the concept to the grammatical structure does not start in the very beginning. This is also true for L1. In the beginning, we try to convey the meaning through context; let us say we do not say the entire thing, we just use context. Eventually, we use lexical items to convey meaning, and only in the last stage do we use grammatical morphemes to do that job.

So, in the beginning, shared extra linguistic knowledge and inferencing based on the context of discourse—that is how you convey meaning—is followed by a lexical item like "yesterday." And then finally, for example, the property of past tense can be difficult to grasp; the concept of past tense, when you are learning it in L1 as well as in L2, may not be marked at all in the initial stages. You just have to understand it by inferring from the context of use. Then you can probably use a word like "yesterday," or if you want to say, for future tense, you might use "later" or "tomorrow," something like this, and eventually the grammatical morpheme will appear.

So, this is an example that I quoted. So, the question asked here to the person was, "What did you do yesterday?" So, in the beginning, they will say something like, "I play soccer." There is no mention of any, either lexically or grammatically, that this playing happened yesterday. But we know it happened yesterday because the question was, "What did you do yesterday?" Eventually, the learners will go to the second stage where they say, "Yesterday, I play soccer." And only when they have mastered the language a little better is when you get the /-ed/ markers. So, the past tense marker appears at the last stage.

So, you have "yesterday, I played". So, I am gradually getting to the grammaticalization stage. This is called the grammaticalization stage, and the process is called the grammaticalization process. The general principle is that there is a steady change in this kind of trajectory. So, initially there is more reliance on the context or on the lexical item, and eventually there is increasing reliance on the grammatical forms. So, increasing reliance on grammatical forms and reduced reliance on lexical and contextual information are what the process is all about.

Initially, there is more reliance on the extra information or lexical entries, and eventually, more on the grammatical. So, that is the trajectory. This is found in all languages. So, basically, expressing meaning through context has been called the pragmatic mode, and from here, you go to what is called the syntactic mode. So, when you are expressing meaning through context or other means, that is what is called pragmatic mode, and when you have arrived at the grammaticalization stage, where you are using morphology, grammatical morphology, or other kinds of functions, whichever the language allows, then you have arrived at the syntactic mode.

And this is considered to be evolutionary in nature, meaning it has a gradual progression over time. So this gradual development also includes many others, as has been proposed, but these are just some I have added; there are many more. For example, topic-comment to subject-predicate structure and then loose conjunction to moving on to tight subordination.

So loose conjunctions, for example, elements are merely juxtaposed or connected with "and." So, it is not very tightly knit, but as you progress, you will have more tight subordination with uses like since, because, and so on.

And then the slow rate of delivery under several intonation contours, and then eventually you move on to a faster rate of delivery within a single intonational contour; these are the important paradigm variables here. Similarly, there will be a balanced ratio of nouns to verbs in the discourse, and in the beginning, you eventually move on to a larger number of nouns as compared to verbs in the sentence, so these are various. So, not only do you go from the pragmatic mode to the syntactic mode while you are at it during those evolutionary stages, but you also go through these kinds of changes, like topic-comment to subject-predicate structures, and so on. Even all the way to the ratio of nouns to verbs. So, when you are having a one-to-one noun and verb, basically what it is talking about is that you are using only one subject and one verb.

So, I do, I go, I walk like this, and then eventually, when you have figured out the case marking, for example, in a language, then you are able to use the direct object, indirect object, subject, and everything in the sentence. So, you are able to create a complex structure because you have figured out the grammatical rules of the language and can use the required morphemes. So, all of these are part of the same evolutionary trajectory that the person goes through from the beginning to the end state in this second language acquisition journey. And then finally, we have another perspective on the functional paradigm, which is called information organization. The focus here is on the utterance structure and the way in which the learners put their words together.

So, this was proposed by Perdue and Klein in 1993 based on a very important study that they carried out. This was basically a project by Klein and his colleagues. So, they studied a number of adult immigrants. So, the study was very interesting. They had studied a number of immigrants from different L1 groups.

So, the entire group that they studied had various different kinds of L1 represented as well as different L2 represented, and they were all immigrants to various European countries. So, this was a European Science Foundation project that they carried out, and it was a longitudinal study. They traced the development through a longitudinal study covering, I think, 3 or 4 years. So, during that time they studied the developmental stages of second language acquisition in those people. So, these people had various L1s like Italian, Punjabi, and many others, and they were also learning different kinds of L2.

So, this kind of mixture gave them a very good opportunity to see, to check if the trajectory of the stages, let us say the interlanguages, is similar or if they follow a similar kind of

pattern across L1 and L2. So, is it a language-specific thing, or is there some kind of universal system pertaining to second language acquisition irrespective of whichever L1 and L2? So, that is what the study was all about. And another important factor in this study was that all of these people had not received any significant amount of formal training. So, in a formal training scenario, the students or the learners will be told overtly about the grammatical structures and what to use where, and so on. But because these people did not receive them to a great degree, it was also an important variable to see how they naturally learn those things and what the trajectory is.

So, the variety of L1 and L2 in the study offered significant insight on the process irrespective of the language. So, the main thing here was the process, not the language. The results showed that irrespective of the languages, all learners go through similar stages of interlanguages. So, I have quoted the mapping here: they had Punjabi, Italian, Turkish, Arabic, Spanish, and Finnish as different kinds of L1 represented native languages, and the target languages were English, German, Dutch, French, and Swedish; in between, they had a lot of, you know, intermixing. So, for example, Punjabis were learning English, and Italians were also learning English.

Similarly, some Italians were learning German, while Turks were learning German as well as Dutch. So, it was a very interesting and mixed group of subjects that they studied, and as a result, the outcome is also very important. Because they found that irrespective of which L1 or L2 group it is, such as what the L1 and L2 are in a particular person or in a particular group, as well as the same L1 with different L2s and the same L2 with different L1s, all kinds of mixing and matching were possible. And irrespective of all that complexity, what they found was that there seems to be a pattern across all of these. All of these different kinds of participants were involved, so the data in one particular case was elicited from a read speech in English where they read a story, and for example, some of the examples that the paper gives are based on this.

So, nominal utterance organization is the first stage, of the gradual stages. So, this is the first stage, which they call NUO (Nominal Utterance Organization), where what the subjects did is put words together one after another. And they seem to be unconnected, unconnected because the grammatical markers are not present; the morphemes are not there. They are simply using the words some "and" here and there and so on. So, the Punjabi speaker, a Punjabi L1 person, said, "Charlie and girl accident.

" They were reading the story, describing a particular scenario, and this is how they produced it. Italian L1, "this man one idea from the window". So, this looks like they were simply taking some words, the basic words that they have learned, and just putting them one after another. So, this is the first stage. Then there is another stage called Infinite

Utterance

Organization

(IUO).

So, this is a stage where more grammatical forms appear, but in bare forms. So, the inflections are still not there, but they are at least using more grammatical forms, like prepositions and so on. So, the Punjabi speaker, for example, says "Charlie and girl and policeman put on the floor". So there is this, you know, kind of slight more complexity that has been added. An Italian speaker, for example, "the blonde friend, tells another woman about the sun" like this: they are discussing it, so it's a little bit more complex.

And then we have finite utterance organization, which is the final stage, and according to the proposal put forth by the scholars in this paper, they state that many of the learners do not go beyond the second stage, which is the infinite stage. Many of them do not go beyond this because whatever the use of their language is does not require them to be a master of the language. This is fine; they can go about without learning beyond this. But people who go beyond this stage attain a particular stage called finite utterance organization.

This is the final stage in which they start to use grammatical morphemes. So, this is the final stage. So, Punjabi L1, "after she said to Charlie, You eat dinner," and then the Italian "He has finished the work". So, all of them are starting to get the proper morphological structure in place, and they are using language as it should be. So, these stages are similar to the stages of grammaticalization that we just saw in the previous structure, where in the initial stages there is just contextual information followed by lexical entries, followed by grammatical forms; similar kinds of structures have been proposed. So, there is a lot of similarity between this paradigm and the one we saw before.

And so they propose a set of principles that learners use to organize information. While they are going through those stages, there are certain kinds of principles that they probably follow. They have described these principles in detail in the paper. So, there are phrasal, semantic, and pragmatic constraints. So, these features and principles interact with each other, and as they go through the stages of interlanguages, the relative weight of these principles changes.

So, the dependence on each of them will change depending on which stage of interlanguage you are. So, they offer four bundles of explanation, not just explanation, to explain what they found. So, the idea is that learners' language development is based on these factors: communicative needs, cross-linguistic influences, extrinsic factors, and limits on processing. So, limits on processing depend on the individual level as well. So, these are various factors that suggest what probably can explain the results they had.

So, in the end, these subjects, these learners, are not trying to learn rules or the structure of the items of the structure, but the primary focus is to construct their own language. This construction is permanently challenged by the constant influx of new input. On the one hand, and by various structural inadequacies on the other hand, that is how they explain it. So, it is not that while going from phase 1 at NUO to the final stage, which is FUI, they are not trying to learn the rules of the language; they are not trying to memorize the structural properties, but they are just creating their own language based on the input; these four factors are in constant flux. So, this constant flux is, of course, the primary property of interlanguages because it is always changing.

So, this is the explanation they have provided. So, the structural inadequacy is another factor that Klein and Perdue proposed in the 1993 publication. So, these are the leading names in the functional approach: Halliday, Talmy, and others. So to sum up, the functional approaches have these basic principles that are common throughout all of this. So we have seen four different perspectives within the functional approach and these properties are constant among all of them. So SLA deals with the acquisition of a system for conveying meaning rather than our acquisition of a set of rules; that is the first thing.

The process of this has to do with the learners' creative involvement in the entire process of communication, and the context of use is indispensable. So, these are the three primary properties on the basis of which all four of these different perspectives are connected. Now, in spite of their important focus on the use, the communicative goal, and the learners' own standpoint in terms of the level of creative involvement, the level of access to the UG, and so on and so forth. There might be differences, but in spite of all this focus, we must keep in mind that the functional approach does not negate the innateness hypothesis. They do not negate that there is probably an innate faculty of language that is already there, which is not in contrast to generativism in that sense.

Here the idea is different from what the learner is trying to achieve and what the main variables for them probably are. But this is also, at the same time, agreeing that there is an innate faculty of language in this. So, that is where we will complete this lecture. In the next lecture, we will take up some other topics. Thank you.