TOWARD A THEORY OF SECOND LANGUAGE (2L) ACQUISITION IN CLASSROOM CONTEXT

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Central to any theory of second language teaching is how a child acquires his second or target language. A number of studies (Corder, 1971; Dulay and Burt, 1972; Cook, 1973; and Menyuk., 1969) were conducted along this area and their findings suggest two crucial issues which are a major concern to second language teaching, namely: the first is on language errors which occur during the process of learning a target language, and the second is on acquiring communicative competence of that language at an appropriate time. On this score, language teachers still do grapple with the problem of handling and optimizing language errors in the classroom while simultaneously promoting and encouraging young 2L learners to become communicatively competent in their target language. How this problem is tackled by language teachers today has something to do with the formulation of realistic and defensible theory of second language acquisition.

Interlanguage and Intralingual Errors Distinguished

There are two general types of language errors produced by 2L learners, namely: interlanguage and intralingual.

It was Larry Selinker (1972) who first popularized the term "interlanguage". According to him, interlanguage is the type of language produced by second language learners the linguistic structure of which is unidentical to the target language. Other applied linguists call this as approximative system (Nemser, 1971); idiosyncratic language (Corder, 1971) ; and transitional competence (Richards, 1971). The concept of interlanguage can be represented as follows:

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Interlanguage

1L ⬛ 2L
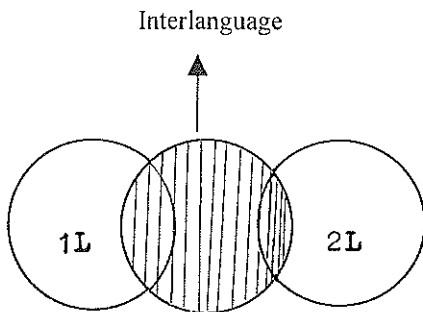
After (Selinker, 1972)

The above diagram shows 1L as the first or native language; 2L as the second or target language; and the darken portion is the resulting interlanguage: For example, a new learner has Tagalog as his first language and English as his target language. Whenever he attempts to communicate his ideas in English, he would likely produce utterances the linguistic structure of which is neither Tagalog nor English. The young 2L learners then produces a brand of English which is not similar to the English as spoken or written by a native speaker of that language. It is during the early stage of acquiring a target language that a new language learner makes lapses and mistakes in his communication. This is technically referred to as interlanguage errors. Interlanguage errors are therefore those mistakes committed by 2L learners during the process of learning a target language the main source of which is the mother tongue's interference.

On the other hand, the term "intralingual" is derived from two words "intra" which means "occurring within" and "lingual" which means the sound of language as used or pronounced by a language learner. Hence, in applied linguistics, intralingual errors are those types produced by 2L learners, regardless of cultural background and orientation, in their attempt to use a target language and which reflect their transitional competence at a certain point in time of learning the aforesaid language. Oftentimes, they are identified as developmental errors because these are interim in nature which occur during a

particular stage of learning a second language. Richards (1974) says that "these are representative of the sort of errors we might expect from anyone learning a second language and are typical of errors which are found in numerous case studies of speakers of particular mother tongues".

Specific Errors Resulting From Learning Strategies Used by 2L Learners

Learning strategies used by young 2L learners for acquiring a target language are oftentimes mistaken as language errors. It is not therefore surprising to note why some applied linguists define errors as deviances resulting from learning strategies used by learners in their desire to communicate ideas in the target language. There are, however, different categories proposed for classifying language errors and in identifying learning strategies. Language researchers like Gorbet (1979), Richards (1971) and Varadi (1973) identify them as follows: (1) Linguistic strategies–these are learning strategies hypothesized to account for the nature of the grammar that the learner seems to be formulating; and (2) Communication strategies – these are learning strategies hypothesized to account for the semantic content of the learner's language development.

Under linguistic strategies employed by 2L learners, the resulting types of errors are interference, over-generalization, redundancy reduction, and random or performance. Interference errors, as the name suggests, are caused by interference from the mother tongue and from the second or target language. Studies have shown that the number of errors is due to the mother tongue interference. An example of a linguistic strategy which underlies interference errors is analogy. Learners who say "he goed" or "he brang" or "he brung" is drawing an analogy with linguistic items they already learned in their target language such as: "he wanted", "ran" and "run". Moreover, errors produced by 2L learners in their employment of overgeneralization as a learning strategy are characterized (1) by incomplete application of rules (a learner sometimes gets it right or he does not); (b) by ignorance of rule restrictions (a learner fails to learn the conditions for rules, that is, he knows the rules but not the exceptions; and (c) by false hypothesized (the learner's intentions about the language are wrong).

Based on Richards' study (1971), some examples of errors resulting from overgeneralization as a learning strategy are:

a) Incomplete application of rules

Teacher's Questions	Pupils Response
What's he doing	-He opening the door
What does he have to do?	-He have to do write the address
Do you read much?	-Yes, I read much.
What does she tell him?	-She tell him to hurry.

b) Ignorance of rule restrictions

"The man who I saw him" – The learner in this example violates the limitation on subjects in structure with "who".

c) False concepts hypothesized – This type of error can be derived from the faulty comprehension distinctions in the target language and can be due to poor degradation of teaching items. For example, "The form 'was' may be interpreted as a marker for the past tense as in "One day it was happened"; or the form 'is' may be interpreted as a marker for the present tense as in "He is speaks Tagalog".

Another type of linguistic strategy as a learning device is redundancy reduction. The error which underlies this strategy is simplification, like, "yesterday, I go downtown". In this example, the learner feels it unnecessary to mark the tense in the verb. Still another examples are: "Sun is very hot" and "Himalayas are ..." In these utterances, the learner omits the article "the": before unique nouns "Sun" and Himalayas".

The last type of linguistic strategies can be grouped under learner's weaknesses or failure of memory. Errors produced in these learning strategies are random errors which are also commonly known as slips of the tongue or occasional lapses. Applied linguists and language researchers also classify them as performance errors. For instance, in the study of Richards (1971), the native French learner says, "What he can ride in?". This specific error is likely made under normal circumstances, that is, when one is tired or in a hurry. It is therefore classified as performance error, not an error of competence. Another example is "This light can impress the film and in this way to fix the image of

the film". Because this is such a lengthy sentence, the 2L learner forgets the consistency of a verb in his utterance and therefore such an error can be charged to memory limitation rather than to competence.

Other learning strategies employed by 2L learners are known as communication strategies. A communication strategy is a device employed by 2L learners that will help them express their ideas in the target language. Drawn from the various typologies of communication strategies, Seroy's study (1981) further discovered and substantiated the use of communication strategies in the interlanguage system of young Filipino learners of English. In the decreasing frequency of occurrence, said study identified the following verbal communication strategies: (1) simplification-reduction (2) repetition, (3) approximation, (4) self-correction, (5) topic avoidance, (6) modeling, (7) literal expression, (8) message abandonment, (9) code-switching (10) circumlocution, (11) word coinage, and (12) appeal for assistance. Some non-verbal communication strategies were also noted, namely: (1) pause, (2) groan (3) facial expression, and (4) sigh.

Simplification-reduction is a communication strategy where the young learner omits or even adds inappropriate linguistic element to some function and content words in his interlanguage. For example, "And he know how to do it". In repetition strategy, the learner repeats words and phrases until he is able to communicate what he intends to say, like "After that, the , the boy..." Approximation strategy occurs when the learner employs a single word of the target language which he knows is wrong but which shares enough features in common with the desired concept in order to satisfy his communicative attempt, like "parade" for "procession". In self-correction strategy, the learner corrects himself whenever he notices that the lexical item or syntactical structure he has used in his target language is wrong. For instance, "the girl were ...was enjoying". Topic avoidance is a communication strategy where the learner purposely avoids the topic which he cannot express it in the English language. In here, he automatically resorts to nonverbal communication strategies, like smiling or simply stopping to talk. In modeling strategy, the learner uses favorite expression of his model speaker or writer when he attempts to express a given idea in English. For instance, "In other words" and "right?" . Literal expression strategy occurs when the learner expresses his idea in the target language based on his literal translation from his first language like this. "After eating supper, they seeing the coronation", from the Cebuano literal translation, "*Human kaon sa panihapon, sila motan-aw sa koronasyon*". In message abandonment, the learner simply abandons a given idea and proceeds to the next

when he cannot express it in English. For instance, "After the mass,... the people ride a ferris wheel: In here, the learner fails to express the idea 'after the mass'; instead, he proceeds to the next picture frame which tells about the ferris wheel. Code-switching is resorted to by the learner when he fails to communicate the idea in straight English, like "And the man *ay nagdala og rebolto*". Circumlocution strategy employs many words for an idea which the learner cannot express it in English. For instance, "They move forward, then... then.... march to the left... and then to the right around the city" for "parade". Word-coinage is a strategy where the learner invents word in place for another which he does not know. For example, "*kodaker*" for "photographer". Appeal for assistance is a strategy where the learner seeks the help of one knows the idea in English. For example, the learner says "Sir, what is this in English" or "*Unsa may buot ipasabot niini Sir*"

The aforesaid discussion implies that language errors should be treated normally for they provide strong positive evidences of the different learning strategies used by 2L learners. Doing so may help hasten the acquisition of their communicative competence in the target language.

Learners' Communicative Competence and the Use of Language Errors

Communicative competence assumes under different rubrics such as "free expression", spontaneous self-expression", functional bilingualism", and language fluency". Savignon (1972) defines communicative competence as the ability to function in a truly communicative setting - that is - in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors". Dell Hymes (1968), on the other hand, suggests that communicative competence includes not only the knowledge or rules for understanding and producing referential meaning but also the knowledge of the social rules of language use.

The above definitions suggest one common idea, that is, if we want our 2L learners to become communicatively competent, then there should be appropriate lessons on free communication activities that do not hamper or stifle the learning process. Hence, 2L teachers should avoid correcting immediately learners' errors every time they attempt to communicate ideas in the target language. The learners likewise be exposed to an environment where they can completely immerse themselves in the target language' idioms, peculiarities, and sociolinguistic features. Studies on first and second language acquisition of

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young learners revealed interesting findings. Firstly, there are actually no differences in the child's first and second language acquisition process. If ever there are differences, learners may only differ in their cognitive approaches towards learning a target language. And secondly, they suggest that our classroom teaching methodologies and approaches should be congruent with how the learners attain communicative competence in an appropriate period of time. Furthermore, language learners learn their first language by completely immersing themselves in full grammatical and lexical items and allowing them to make mistakes and lapses. They are then permitted to make errors along the way and this is noticeable in their interim grammar which is loaded with language errors. These errors are and have been liberally considered by competent native speakers to be highly developmental in nature. Likewise, their incorrect statements are always rewarded as correct by the adult speaker and thus, they continue to keep on testing their hypotheses until they reach adult competence in their native language. One should not lose sight of the fact that a child's language process is a full-time occupation for him. Hence, all learning opportunities and activities are not graded, sequenced and structured.

The above scenario points out that our second language classroom environment should approximately follow the natural practices and methodologies experienced by a learner learning his native or first language. Language teachers should not resort to immediately correcting the language errors of new learners. Instead , they should pay more attention not to the perfectness of learners' linguistics structures but to the content or meaning of what they are communicating. It does not mean that error correction should not be made but should be prioritized, that is, understanding the message first before paying attention to the correctness of the linguistic structure. Moreover, language errors should be systematically observed and studied. They are not meant to scare us as a consequence of the language teaching methodologies we use but should be considered as aids to improving and maximizing second language teaching-learning in classroom settings. Hendrickson (1978) says:"... foreign language teachers should expect many errors from their students, and should accept those errors as a natural phenomenon integral to the process of learning a second language. When teachers tolerate some student errors, students are often feel more confident about using the target language than if all their errors are corrected. Teachers are reminded that people make mistakes when learning new skills but not that people learn from their mistakes when they receive periodic, supportive feedback. After all, language errors are interim and developmental in nature which are not meant to be completely eradicated but instead, can only be optimized through well-planned, organized, and systematic

procedures of error corrections. Only adequate time spent for learning the target language and proper exposure to it can perhaps answer for such elimination of errors.

If the practices of 2L teachers would be similar to how native learners learn their first language, then 2L learners could attain a level of communicative competence at an earlier time compared to what we are experiencing for the moment.

A Second Language Acquisition Theory Proposed

At this juncture, let us try to propose a theory of second acquisition theory which is quite realistic and defensible. The proposed theoretical model of 2L acquisition on the next page considers Noam Chomsky's Learner's Language Acquisition Device (LLAD). Accordingly, the LLAD theory views that a certain part of the brain is specifically assigned for language learning, and that if it is put to active use, then man can easily learn a language of his virtual need, choice and interest. The model shows the "who" and the "how" for the input and the "what" for the expected output. The "who" in the model is referred to as the language learner. In here, the teacher considers the produced 2L speech (grammatical, lexical, morphological, syntactical and discourse) as the consequence of the natural learning approaches a given learner has used in acquiring a target language. The 2L learning process is facilitated by the teacher who assesses first the learner's needs, characteristics and motivation level before he rejects the classroom process of teaching-learning a second language. How is this process done? The intention of "how" (still a part of the input stage) is achieved by employing the creative and dynamic natural learning process methodology. During this period, the learner, with all the prepared and unstructured exercises, is always permitted to keep on testing his 2L hypotheses until he acquires the expected output, that of learning a second language. With all creativity, dynamism, resourcefulness, initiative and understanding, the 2L teacher sees to it that during the acquisition process the learner is free to communicate and always rewarded for incorrect statement as correct: decides that the learner's language errors are not corrected but systematically observed and studied; focuses on the content (message) of what the learner is trying to communicate; provides a leeway for the learner to be exposed to 2L environment; and finally, permits the learner to learn the target language through unstructured communication activities. Expectedly, what follows after all these 2L acquisition techniques is that the learner learns his target language. In all practicality and functionality as evaluated by the 2L teacher, the learner

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relatively reaches the adult competence of the target language. Relatively, in a sense that the learner still allows his LLAD to acquire more 2L speech data through the passage of time in a highly supportive and encouraging classroom environment and appropriate exposure to either a simulated or an actual 2L
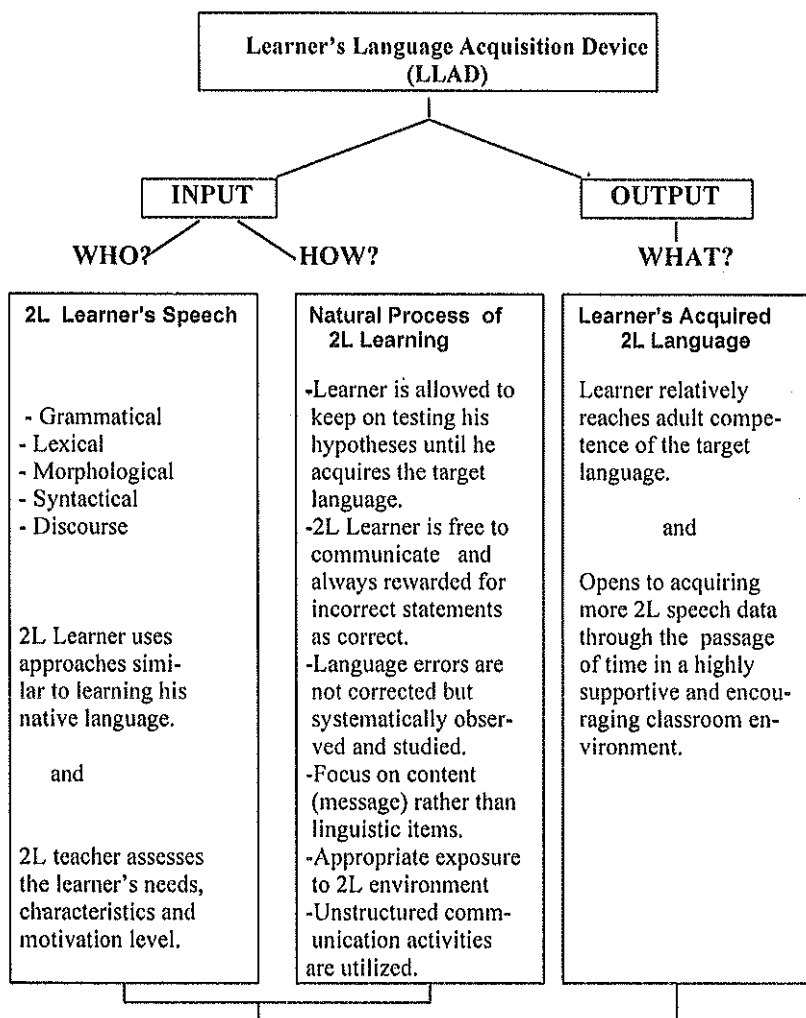
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              ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
              │ Learner's Language Acquisition Device │
              │              (LLAD)                   │
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INPUT		OUTPUT
WHO?	HOW?	WHAT?
2L Learner's Speech	**Natural Process of 2L Learning**	**Learner's Acquired 2L Language**
- Grammatical - Lexical - Morphological - Syntactical - Discourse 2L Learner uses approaches similar to learning his native language. and 2L teacher assesses the learner's needs, characteristics and motivation level.	-Learner is allowed to keep on testing his hypotheses until he acquires the target language. -2L Learner is free to communicate and always rewarded for incorrect statements as correct. -Language errors are not corrected but systematically observed and studied. -Focus on content (message) rather than linguistic items. -Appropriate exposure to 2L environment -Unstructured communication activities are utilized.	Learner relatively reaches adult competence of the target language. and Opens to acquiring more 2L speech data through the passage of time in a highly supportive and encouraging classroom environment.

Figure 1. Theoritical Model of 2L Acquisition in Classroom Context

environment. The learner should be further provided with meaningful use of his target language which he himself shall continue to "store, segment and eventually combine in synthesizing new situations". And presto, the learner becomes communicatively competent in his target language.

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