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Learner Language

Sisko Brunni and Jarmo H. Jantunen

Historical Perspectives

Since the beginnings of research on language learning and teaching, learner language analysis has been the natural starting point for researchers. Even though learner language has offered information on the language variants produced by learners, learner language has been researched to a great extent to describe the learning process. By examining learner language, researchers have aimed to discover what happens in language learning, on the one hand, and between different language pairs, on the other hand, as well as how this should be taken into consideration in language teaching. Ellis (2008) divides learner language research into four development phases: examination of the errors that learners make, development phases in learning, learner language variation, and pragmatic success.

Actual theory-based learner language research had a strong start in the 1960s with error analysis, which had a natural foundation in that much attention had traditionally been paid to errors and how to correct them. Error analysis focuses specifically on analysing learner products, as opposed to earlier contrastive research, where the tendency was to explain learning by comparing the learner's mother tongue and the target language and then predict problems in learning based on this comparison. The fundamental idea was that by analysing and classifying errors, one would be

able to discover what happens in the learning process and how it proceeds (see Corder 1967; George 1972; Richards 1974). As a method of studies using error analysis, especially in the early decades, the theoretical framework has typically been the interlanguage theory. Interlanguage (Selinker 1972; see also Corder 1971) is the language learner's language system, which is systematic and is governed by its own laws. Typical characteristics of interlanguage are implicit language knowledge, regularity, progress in phases, and variation (Ellis 1990). The interlanguage concept has been widely replaced by the concept of learner language, which is not tied to similar premises. For example, not all researchers consider variability as an inherent feature for interlanguage, and learning strategies responsible for interlanguage development are very controversial issues (Ellis [and Barkhuizen](#) 2005, 55).

Error analysis proceeds in phases, from collecting the product to identifying, classifying, interpreting, and evaluating errors (Corder 1974; Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005). Research data can be collected from language spontaneously produced by learners, but due to the challenges related to the collecting process, completely spontaneous data is usually replaced with data that has been defined according to certain criteria and collected specifically for the purposes of the research. This data is first processed to find the errors based on grammatical rules and the rules of acceptability; then, performance errors (mistakes) are distinguished from actual competence errors (errors) when necessary (Corder 1967). Next, the detected errors are classified according to certain taxonomy. The classes may include omissions, additions, misformation, or misordering (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982; James 1998). The reasons for these errors are sought through interpretations; Richards (1971) lists mother tongue interference (interference errors), overgeneralisation of the target language characteristics or the wrong kind of applications (intralingual errors), as well as

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creating hypotheses based on inadequate language skills (developmental errors) as background factors (for closer analysis, see Ellis 2008, 53–56). Finally, the errors are analysed from the point of view of successful communication and comprehensibility of the message. Even though error analysis has been much criticised, for example, for focusing specifically on what the learner does not know (and not on what the learner knows) and for unsystematic collecting of the background data in the studies, the method is still in use. Despite the limitations of this method, the study of errors has a practical significance to language pedagogy, since it reveals which features in language are difficult for a learner at certain levels. Without understanding the nature of the error, teachers are not able to focus on the difficulties and problematic issues in language acquisition. The latest applications of the method are its use in corpus-based learner language research: Several learner corpora—such as *International Corpus of Learner English* (Granger 2003)—have been annotated making use of error taxonomy.

Research in the development phases of learning developed quickly alongside error analysis; the research was guided by the presumption that language proficiency changes through certain systematic phases and that second language development is at least partially similar to mother language acquisition (L2 = L1 hypothesis). When defining learning, the researchers have aimed to discover the point at which an expression appears for the first time and the point when it has been adopted so well that the learner is able to use it almost continuously in a manner appropriate to the target language. According to Ellis (2008, 68–69), the focus of the research is on obligatory use situations of linguistic elements (obligatory occasion analysis), target-like language use (target-like use analysis), and frequencies of linguistic elements (frequency analysis). In terms of development, changes in fluency, accuracy, and complexity during learning may be examined. The research

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objects and methods are closely related, because the linguistic elements examined are described according to development phases and the comparison made with target language instead of understanding that the learners' product has its own system governed by its own laws (cf. Bley-Vroman 1983 for comparative fallacy). The development phases are described based on individual and small group data that is collected in longitudinal studies: language learners were observed for a certain time period (usually less than a year) in order to examine the development of their language proficiency (see, e.g., Wong-Fillmore 1979; Schumann 1978).

Longitudinal studies have revealed that the development of L2 proceeds in certain similar learning phases and that these phases typically appear in a certain order, regardless of the learner or their mother tongue (e.g., confusing languages and semantic and grammatical simplicity are typical phenomena in the early phases of language learning). However, regardless of the learners' general tendencies, the learners have their own learning paths and the pace of learning in particular varies according to the individual. This research tradition represents the meeting of two different research questions in language learning: What are the universal characteristics of language learning (e.g., cognitive processes of learning), on the one hand, and characteristics of individual variation (e.g., learning strategies, age, motivation), on the other hand? How can the effect that they have on learning be discovered? From the point of view of data use, research has proceeded more and more towards using authentic language data: Many case studies have been based on real speech or discourse material. In current studies based on vast corpora, research on individual variation and general tendencies are often combined.

Even though much research aims to find general tendencies in language learning, it has not been able to ignore the vast and diverse variation in learner language. Using statistical analyses and

manipulation tests, research has focused on the variation brought about by the mother tongue and target language as well as the social environment, on the one hand, and the variation among language learners and the product of one language learner, on the other hand. Variation in learner language has not been considered as an unusual phenomenon as such, since language contains natural variation in any case: language changes by idiolect, register, region, et cetera. The following models have been used to explain the variation present in learner language (Ellis 2008, 117–128):

- 1) According to the homogenous competence model, variation is a phenomenon that is a part of the performance, and not as such a characteristic of the learner's systemic language knowledge. Variation presents itself as slips and performative errors, and the focus of research is intuitive knowledge of correct or possible expressions, and not actual language use.
- 2) The sociolinguistic model emphasises the idea that the language user's and learner's competence inherently creates variation. Variation can be caused by the language itself (e.g., the abundant and varied cases in synthetic languages), social context of the language use (such as social status, age, or gender and the meaning of these factors in a language use situation) as well as internal variation of individual speakers or external variation of different speakers in terms of vocabulary, registers, and styles.
- 3) The psycholinguistic approach emphasises the ability of the language learner to process L2 information. It has been observed, for example, that preparation input and the time used on the product affect the quality of the product and cause variation (e.g., Crookes 1989; Ochs

1979). In addition, language learners have the ability to monitor their product, or improve it by reducing errors or by selecting forms more appropriate to the context.

- 4) The two latter factors are combined in the social-psychological model, according to which variation is created through the joint influence of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors in institutional, social and other—such as ethnic—groups. Observations have been made, for example, of how people engaged in discussion adjust (or do not adjust) their language according to whether there are non-native speakers involved in the discussion (see Zuengler 1991).

Because language proficiency denotes not only the application of formal language knowledge in practice, but also situational language competence, there has been increasing interest in learner language pragmatics, or pragmatic competence. Pragmatic success is influenced by, for example, the learner's mother tongue, transfer, and the learner's status in the conversation. Learners can, for example, transfer the language use rules of their native language and home culture to the target language and culture, which can manifest itself as over- or under-politeness or in different practices of who is allowed to address whom and start a conversation.

Based on the analysis of different interviews, role-play, and field situations, as well as introspective analysis, researchers have reached the conclusion that even if the formal language knowledge of the learners is good, they still have many problems with politeness as well as with producing requests, apologies, and refusals, especially from a pragmatic perspective. In addition, it has been noted that in communicative situations, the language learner is often not an equal participant and that their social status may change in the target society. It is therefore crucial to ask

what kind of a status the conversation partners assign to someone whose language use is not native-like (see Kang and Rubin 2009).

The previously described historical developments are not separate from each other methodologically or temporally. At present, none of these research traditions have entirely disappeared from SLA research.

Core Issues and Key Findings

When researching second language acquisition, the object may be the product itself, the production process and, even more generally, how the overall learning process takes place. By researching the language produced by learners (the product), knowledge is accumulated on the simplicity vs. complexity, atypical frequencies and structures typical of the vocabulary, and other linguistic features of the learner language. Characteristics on the level of production, such as overgeneralisation, simplification, and avoidance strategies, are more difficult to study because they are not clearly visible in the product but require experimental methods and interpretation of the results. Characteristics explaining the products, however, may include, for example, the influence of L1 language and possible universals of the learner language (e.g., over-generalisation and simplification have been suggested as more or less universal characteristics of language learning, see e.g. Odlin 2002; Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008; Jantunen 2008), and this concerns research on the whole learning process. Vast international cooperation projects focusing on several languages are necessary in order to examine these factors in the future.

When the restrictions of error analysis were acknowledged and, instead of studying the deficiencies in the language, the entire L2 product of the learner became the object of study, the realisation was made that errors are not merely deficiencies in language skills but rather are an essential and necessary part of language development. Based on this observation, researchers started to examine the learner's language system as its own system, as the abovementioned interlanguage (Selinker 1972), which has its own typical features (Ellis 1990). As the interlanguage is not a perfect or stable system, new forms from both the external language environment as well as the language itself infiltrate it easily. This can be seen, for example, in over-presentation and irregular use of certain forms. Behind interlanguage there are the general learning and communication strategies that predispose towards oversimplification and overuse of expressions, on the one hand, but also avoiding certain expressions and negotiation of meaning of other expressions, on the other hand. Interlanguage can be characterised as mainly implicit language awareness; its users are not aware of its regularities.

The central question in the research area of learner language is to discover the nature of the language development process in order to explain and predict the acquisition process. By examining interlanguage, researchers have discovered that language learners construct their language skills step by step and review certain phases during the process, but development does not by any means proceed in a linear manner towards a target language product resembling that of native language users of the language. Instead, it may include recession phases and the language may fossilise at times (or stabilize; see Long 2003) to a certain stage. This observation is very significant from a pedagogic point of view because it forms a basis for considering the order in which, for example, morphemes should be taught. On the other hand, great variation may take

place in the language of one learner depending on the situation and the tasks; examining the variation in learner language has, in fact, been an essential phase in examining interlanguage. This variation is in part random, but it also exhibits signs of systematicity. For example, the odds for some certain forms appearing may be predicted according to how much time the speaker has for planning what they have to say and who the recipient is (see Tarone 1983; Preston 1996). Despite variation, the tendency is nevertheless that the learner proceeds phase-by-phase towards native-like language.

From a pedagogic point of view, it is even more significant that the phases of language acquisition of a certain language exhibit the same tendency for regularity of phases even on a general level as the language development of an individual. For example, the formation of different interrogative sentences is learnt in more or less the same order (e.g., Pienemann et al. 1988), regardless of the background of the language learner. Understanding the phases of the language development and the order of the phases may be a concrete aid in syllabus planning: what is taught, when, and in which order. However, recent dynamic approaches L2 development (cf. Larsen-Freeman 1997; de Bot et al. 2007) focus on patterns of variation that accompany developmental trends: The trajectory of L2 development is not necessary straightforward.

The development of different areas (e.g., vocabulary, syntax) of learner language can be examined through individual phenomena, but on a more general level the development process can be seen in the development of language accuracy, fluency, and complexity, which includes the separate areas. Evaluation of language accuracy is based on the target language that the learner language is compared to: The closer the learner language is to the language spoken by native speakers, the more accurate it is. The studies focus mainly on grammatical issues; they examine, for

example, the number of correct sentences, the share of target-language morphologic or lexical expressions, and self-corrections (see Crookes 1989; Ellis and Yuan 2005). The problem, however, is defining which variety of the native language should be used as the norm in each case.

Furthermore, it is good to note that the concepts of “native language” and “native speaker” are arbitrary (Paikeday 1985), since native speakers also violate grammatical rules (Mulder and Hulstijn 2011, 491)

Fluency, on the other hand, is related to the language production process. Automatisation of the language, reaction speed, corrections, breaks, and idiomacy of expressions, as well as native-like usage, are seen as background issues. The methods focus either on measuring the speed of writing or speech or hesitation expressing non-fluent language, which can be examined through breaks or corrections, for example (see, e.g., Skehan and Foster 2008). Complexity, on the other hand, tells about the learner’s ability to use non-automatised language that is difficult and pushes the limits of the individual’s knowledge as well as command of complex linguistic structures. The phenomenon is related to many levels of language: The language can be approached from an interactive perspective, measuring, for example, the turns taken, or it can be measured from a lexical or grammatical perspective (the number of words, number of sentences, subordinate and coordinate relationships within sentences, or frequency of some grammatical feature, such as number of verb arguments; see, e.g., Yuan and Ellis 2003).

Research on development areas is also significant in terms of language teaching and classroom conventions. Teacher planning, expressions and structures used by the teacher, guidelines for assignments, and the chance for students to plan their product—all of these are factors affecting the development of the students’ accuracy, complexity, and fluency (see Skehan

and Foster 1997; Crookes, 1989; Tavakoli and Skehan 2005; Ellis and Yuan 2005; Rahimpour and Nariman-Jahan 2011; Skehan et al. 2012). On the other hand, task types, the students' level of competence, and other external factors may also affect how advance planning, for example, influences the product.

In recent decades, factors affecting the product and production process, especially crosslinguistic influence, have become an important research topic, in addition to the analysis of learner language characteristics. Mother tongue transfer has been an object of research for a long time. In its initial stages, source language was seen merely as a negative influence interfering with target language acquisition, whereas nowadays researchers believe that the mother tongue may have a positive as well as a negative effect. In addition, the influence is not limited to structural factors and the product, but the influence must always be examined on the level of language processing. One way to examine the effect of the source language is to examine the learner language products of learners of the same target language and speakers of a different source language and compare the general tendencies and probabilities visible in these products. Another way to compare the source and learner language is to look for statistically significant repetitions resembling the source language in the learner language. The research of interlingual influence is at its most effective when both methods are combined (Odlin 1989; Selinker 1992; Jarvis 2000). However, the influence of the source language is such a complex process that even though at present much of the research is done with non-English language data, and the vast learner language corpus data have opened up new possibilities, the nature of the process cannot yet be completely explained. There are many ways in which the source language may or may not have an effect.

Research Approaches

According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005, 9–11), SLA research may be divided into three research paradigms: normative, interpretative, and critical analysis. The aim of the first is to test the general hypotheses of L2 acquisition objectively; interpretative analysis aims to understand and discover variables related to learning and their relations; and the last paradigm is interested in sociopolitical and ideological issues in language learning. Each of these has its own typical methods and data, even though the research paradigms are rarely seen in studies in a pure form. Normative research traditionally uses tests and questionnaires directed at vast groups of learners that are analysed, mostly quantitatively. Interpretative analyses are based on qualitative case studies, and the purpose of a study is not to generalise on a wide scale but “to describe and understand some aspect of L2 acquisition subjectively” (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005, 10). Like interpretative research, at its most typical, critical analysis is also qualitative and is based on case studies. It aims to identify the sociopolitical conditions and power relations that hinder learners from acquiring target languages.

The data used in the research vary greatly depending on the research questions. They can be divided roughly into three categories, according to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). Non-linguistic data describes the reactions of a language learner to a certain stimulus or tests their understanding and discovery of grammatical structures. This metalinguistic data helps access the language learner’s intuitive and introspective knowledge regarding language, but the data is not exactly suitable for examining learner language. Instead, different samples of the learners’ products are core material for the study of learner language. Examining the expressions produced by learners starts with collection and analysis of different elicited data.

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Collecting elicited data has been relatively simple, which has guaranteed this approach's popularity for research purposes—true to this day. Elicited data can be divided into two groups (Corder 1981): Clinically elicited data have been assembled for a specific study, in which case they may be data compiled from tasks that strive to describe the language in a general way and are contextualised (e.g., shopping lists) or from tasks that are focused and aim to describe certain structures or linguistic phenomena (e.g., tasks that produce requests or grammatical forms). Experimental elicitation test data are most likely the best-known data used in language learning research. They typically consist of different fill-in-the-blank exercises (fill in words or sentences) or question-answer exercises, the purpose of which is to obtain as products those language features that the researcher is interested in. The weakness of both types of elicited data is considered to be that they do not represent the natural product of language learners. For this reason, researchers have turned to collecting data for the purpose of describing specifically the kind of language that language learners would produce in natural language use situations.

More recent research data are usually extensive, and when compiling them one may take into consideration the fact that they would be suitable for research data for more than one study. These data have typically been written language data, but spoken language and recently also multimodal (e.g., video-recorded) data are increasingly used. The most extensive data are electronic corpus data, which at present are abundant. The most extensive and best-known data is *International Corpus of Learner English* (Granger 2003), which includes argumentative essays by advanced learners. So far, most corpora are indeed compilations of one text type and only contain products by advanced students. Similarly to elicited data, corpus data also have their own problems from the point of view of research: Even though corpora at present represent natural learner

products, their data has not been produced entirely spontaneously, as the texts have usually been collected for a corpus either during classroom teaching or, for example, through online compilation. Like all instructors know, learners write using expressions that they master well or believe they master. Therefore it is not easy to access expressions that the learners do not fully master, which means that the corpus data, likewise any other learner data, do not reveal the whole picture of learner language and knowledge of a language. In addition, corpora only allow for indirect analysis of the learning process because it is only possible to make interpretations based on the data; it is not usually possible to ask the producer of the text why they have produced a certain expression or how they have come to a certain solution. In addition to, or in combination with, learner language data, it is of course possible to collect introspective reports and self-evaluations about the motives behind the product through interviews, forms, Script Logs (which are recording tools for research on the process of writing and which keep a record of all events on the keyboard), or think-aloud protocol. Such versatile combination of methods, however, is still quite rare.

New Debates

To date, most of the research conducted has been such that cannot be used to carefully describe the development of learner language with reference to different levels. This is due to the fact that longitudinal studies have been made with very small sample sizes or that the method has been a so-called quasi-longitudinal study, which means that the informants have not been the same across different proficiency levels. With the current corpus methods, it would be possible to compile extensive data that contain texts by the same text producers in different phases of language

learning. Ever larger corpora create the possibility for drawing better comparisons and collecting quantitative data on the different phases of learner language development.

The lack of spoken data in comparison to written data is partially related to the abovementioned situation. Despite the fact that collecting spoken language data is challenging, obtaining this data is necessary for the needs of research; after all, spoken language is usually predominant in relation to the written variant in terms of communication purposes. Extensive spoken language data already exist to some extent, such as LINDSEI (Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage, Gilquin et al. 2010) and MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, Simpson et al. 2002), but they usually consist of discourses produced by English learners. Researchers should therefore strive to collect data more extensively in different languages. The latter is also true of learner language data and research on a wider scale, as they examine learner language and, through it, language learning. Considering the language situation in the world, it is natural that English language corpora are dominant and the research is focused largely on learning English and Indo-European languages.

If we wish to examine language learning on a wider scale—for example, from the point of view of universal tendencies—the current distorted situation does not grant the possibility for this. It is therefore extremely important that both spoken and written data be collected from other widely spoken—and studied—languages, such as learner’s Chinese and learner’s Indian, but also less studied languages, such as Finno-Ugric languages. Examining smaller and less-studied languages challenges previous studies and may bring up features of learning and learner language that cannot be accessed through analysing current language data. For example, examining the learning of

synthetic languages rich in morphology would be particularly rewarding in terms of learner language research.

English, which is poor in morphology, does not reveal morphological and morphosyntactic problems. Even though analysis of morphological, morphophonological, and morphosyntactic characteristics has a strong basis in, for example, research in the synthetic Finno-Ugric languages, these characteristics have not been examined as extensively elsewhere—and whereas learner English has been examined greatly in terms of syntax and vocabulary, lexical research has not become popular in researching, for example, learning the synthetic Finnish language. In order to obtain a general description or a theoretical model regarding language learning, there is need to balance and increase research objects in different languages, on one hand from the point of view of selecting language phenomena to be examined and on the other hand from the point of view of researching registers and genres.

The research in learning vocabulary is closely related to research in learning phraseology and lexical priming, which means the expected preferences for expressions from lexical and grammatical factors to stylistic and textual co-occurrences (see Hoey 2005 on lexical priming). Both are important from a pedagogic point of view: how the expressions should be taught in entities larger than one word so that learning and reception would become easier and faster and so that the learner product would become native-like faster. It is, however, questionable, whether the native-like performance is most learners' goal in the first place and whether the appropriate model for language use comes from native speakers (Cook 1999). Research performed so far (e.g., Nesselhauf 2005) has shown that even extremely advanced students make abundant phraseological errors when producing collocations atypical of the target language. In examining priming and

phraseology in learner language, there is also reason to move to a more abstract level than collocations: how language learners master the semantic associations of expressions, and what is the learners' priming—or morphologic priming (the characteristics related to use of the conjugated forms of words in the core and context of an expression) in general regarding synthetic languages (see Jantunen and Brunni 2013).

Transfer and lately cross-linguistic influence in a wider sense has possibly been the most examined phenomenon in language learning (see, e.g., Odlin 1989; Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008). There is still, however, ignorance regarding what is the significance of previously learnt languages in language learning. How can mother tongue transfer be seen in learning and what kind of role in learning and the product do second or third languages have? There is also a lack of extensive research data as to how language learning and learnt languages affect the use of the mother tongue; does learning other languages enrich one's expressive repertoire, will it bring transfer to the mother tongue—and if so, what kind?

Nowadays (in Europe) it is also important to start considering the applicability of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe 2001) as a tool for describing learner language. There is reason to determine how the framework, based on assessing active language proficiency, can be used to describe and assess the learner's products and what kind of structural and lexical characteristics are represented at which level. In addition, there is reason to pay attention to the consistency of assessing the products: Are the assessment decisions made by different assessors consistent, and, if not, how and why are the assessments different? The last question is critical when the products are being

assessed for vast language data such as corpora: How consistent must the assessments be in order to include the product in research data?

Implications for Education

Currently one speaks of language acquisition and development instead of learning, and it is understood that only a small part of the processes are due to classroom-type education. In fact, the entire language system and language learning are seen, for example, in the Dynamic Systems Theory, as a chaotic, nonlinear process in constant change, where everything affects everything and the changes happening are due to both internal and external circumstances (Larsen-Freeman 1997; 2002; de Bot et al. 2007). For this reason, the traditional pedagogic key issues have become more important than ever: Does guided teaching help in acquiring some language features, and are there some teaching methods that are more efficient than others? How can all this be seen in the learner's product? When and in what order do certain language features manifest themselves in the learner language and how do they become regular? The acquisition should be understood as a holistic phenomenon instead of clear-cut learning processes and teaching methods that would be functional to all language learners and all language learning situations. The complexity of language teaching and acquisition is added to by the fact that the L2 teaching field is vast and includes teaching children as well as adults, learning in classrooms, the internet, target-language countries, or environments with no contact with the target language. In addition, the learner may have an academic education or be illiterate. One of the great challenges of L2 pedagogy is to be able to offer the best possible teaching for all those who need it. In this task, the language user cannot be separated from the environment in which the learning takes place: learning is closely linked to

sociocognitive thinking, and there is need for holistic theories connecting language, cognition, and interaction. Nowadays, learning environments and interaction are examined to a great deal, for example, negotiations of meaning, communication strategies, influence of the learning environment, and the teacher's role in the teaching situation. With these research settings, researchers aim to discover how and through what kind of classroom practices it is possible to attain the aspired goals.

Developing L2 pedagogy is one of the most significant reasons why we began to study learner language in the first place. When discussing teaching, its parallel concept, learning, must be defined. Has a certain linguistic phenomenon been learnt when it occurs in the language for the first time, or only after it has been used correctly in most cases? Research uses both definitions, but since the former is a somewhat unreliable meter, some researchers (see, e.g., Pienemann 1985) have defined the occurrence of a phenomenon in the learner language two times as the prerequisite for learning. When learning has been defined, it becomes possible to examine the order of learning phenomena, which—as stated previously—observes a certain order not only on an individual level, but also on a general level. In this manner, it is possible to discover a language learning theory or model for a certain language that could be used in producing teaching materials, teacher training, and developing assessment methods and equipment, as well as in concrete classroom situations. However, it is dangerous to generalise, for example, a certain model concerning English into a universal model, as language acquisition is affected by so many variables, such as the proximity of the source and target languages and whether they are related. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that language acquisition varies substantially also within one language: Individual learning

strategies, learners' backgrounds, learning contexts, teaching methods, et cetera, all affect how a language is acquired and how learning paths will develop.

Language development and acquisition of language features in a certain order also helps in developing assessment methods, since the development process can be divided into levels according to phases, with certain language features occurring at each phase. An example of such a skill level description is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe 2001). Its primary purpose is to assist in comparing interpretations, but it also functions as an aid in assessment and producing teaching material on a national level. Language proficiency is described with the help of a six-step proficiency level scale, and it is thus the basis for the common language policies of the European Union. A similar interlingual assessment and comparison scale has not previously been in use.

It is a great pedagogic challenge to apply the results of the development work and research knowledge in teacher training and study books. Researchers have long discussed, for example, phraseology and its significance in second language acquisition. The phraseological units used by learners and natives differ, and according to research even time spent in a target-language country does not automatically make these units consistent; awareness of phraseology must be made clear to the students through systematic teaching, which means a new type of approach to language (Meunier and Granger 2008; Nesselhauff 2005). Lewis (1993; 1997) approaches the topic from a pedagogic point of view and speaks of a so-called Lexical Approach, where the limits between vocabulary and grammar are shaken also in the teaching, and vocabulary is seen more as a lexicon that consists not only of words, but also of collocations, idioms, and institutional expressions. A similar new approach to language and its acquisition is Hoey's (2005) lexical priming, where words

are examined in their actual contexts of use and the focus is on their interactive relationship to lexical, grammatical, and semantic co-occurrences. Only awareness of this will help speakers develop into fluent, creative, and natural target-language speakers.

Further Reading

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