

PECULIARITIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: LEARNING THEORIES AND GLOBAL HYPOTHESES

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Abstract: *This thesis explores the unique characteristics of language acquisition by examining major learning theories and global hypotheses that explain how humans acquire language. It analyzes the cognitive, social, and biological dimensions of language development, comparing first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition processes. Emphasis is placed on theoretical models such as Behaviorism, Nativism, Interactionism, and the Critical Period Hypothesis. By evaluating global perspectives, this study highlights universal and culturally specific factors that influence language acquisition.*

Keywords: *language acquisition, learning theories, global hypotheses, L1 and L2 acquisition, critical period, nativism, interactionism*

Introduction

Language acquisition is a fundamental cognitive process through which humans develop the capacity to perceive, produce, and use words to communicate. Understanding its mechanisms has long been a key concern in linguistics, psychology, and education. This study investigates the peculiarities of language acquisition and evaluates prominent theoretical frameworks and global hypotheses that address how language is learned and internalized.

Theoretical Foundations of Language Acquisition

1 Behaviorist Theory

Behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner proposed that language learning is a result of imitation, repetition, and reinforcement. Language is acquired through environmental stimuli and responses, without invoking internal mental states.

2 Nativist Theory

Championed by Noam Chomsky, the nativist perspective argues for an innate biological mechanism—the Language Acquisition Device (LAD)—which enables children to acquire language naturally and rapidly.

3 Interactionist Theory

This theory combines elements of both environmental and innate influences, emphasizing the importance of social interaction in language development. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory exemplifies this approach.

4 Cognitive Theory

Jean Piaget suggested that language acquisition is closely linked to general cognitive development. Language is not separate from thought, but rather emerges as cognitive structures mature.

Global Hypotheses of Language Acquisition

1 The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

CPH posits that there is a biologically determined window during which language acquisition occurs most efficiently, typically before puberty.

2 Universal Grammar (UG)

Chomsky's UG theory asserts that all human languages share a common underlying structure, and that children are born with an implicit knowledge of this structure.

3 Input Hypothesis

Proposed by Stephen Krashen, this hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input—language that is slightly above the learner's current level ($i+1$).

4 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Also introduced by Krashen, this theory suggests that emotional variables (e.g., motivation, anxiety, self-confidence) influence the success of language acquisition.

Peculiarities of First and Second Language Acquisition

- L1 Acquisition: Generally occurs naturally and unconsciously in a supportive environment. It is uniform across cultures.

- L2 Acquisition: Often influenced by age, prior language knowledge, motivation, and exposure. More conscious and effortful than L1 acquisition.

- Transfer and Interference: L2 learners may apply rules from their native language, leading to errors or facilitating learning.

Cultural and Global Perspectives

Global research reveals both universal patterns and cultural variability in language learning. For example, in some cultures, child-directed speech is common and aids acquisition, while in others, language is acquired primarily through observation. These differences challenge the universality of some Western-based theories.

Implications for Language Teaching and Policy

Understanding language acquisition theories supports effective teaching strategies, curriculum design, and language policy development. It promotes learner-centered approaches and underscores the importance of early exposure and supportive environments for optimal language development.

Conclusion

Language acquisition is a multifaceted process shaped by biological, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. Theories and global hypotheses offer complementary insights that help explain the complexity of how language is learned. A balanced understanding of these perspectives is essential for educators, linguists, and policymakers to support effective language development in diverse contexts.