Personality and Language Acquisition: When learners take control of their L2

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The workshop

• Overall goal
  – To introduce teachers to an empirical research design that can be brought into the classroom as powerful pedagogical tools for both facilitating learning and assessing it.

• Specific goals
  – To deconstruct the scientific method and search for similarities to the facilitation of language acquisition in the classroom.
  – To provide teachers with a conceptual framework to close the assessment loop based on learner/learning-centered approaches.
The SLA findings

Aguilar-Sanchez (forthcoming) asked 5 important questions regarding how learners process pragmatic knowledge in their second language. These questions were the following:
The SLA findings

1. Do learners of Spanish as a second language use the pronouns of address following native speaker rules? If so, is variation in usage present in their interlanguage?

- Yes, from early stages of interlanguage, learners are able to demonstrate choice of pronouns of address similar to the choice made by native speakers.
  - Yes, there is variation among learners and this depends on pragmatic, social, linguistic, and even psychological variables contrary to what has been study so far.
2. Do social variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns? If so, which social variables influence their usage?

- Yes, social variables such as place of birth/upbringing seem to influence learners’ choices of pronouns of address at least in the case of the “usted” form.
The SLA findings

3. What pragmatic variables influence the use and/or variation of these pronouns?

- Familiarity with the interlocutor seem to be the most influential variable to both learners and native speakers.
- Mode of dress seem to influence the choice too. We need to tease out formal wear and formal situations and conduct a cultural perception test of what formal dressing constitutes. These results are preliminary.
The SLA findings

4. Does an overt pronoun of address in the prompt sentence influence the use of these forms?

- Yes, the presence or absence of the pronoun in the prompt sentence seem to play a role in the selection of both tú and usted. In the selection of tú where the absence of the pronoun helped the selection of this form, this might be because the tú form of address is the form that is included in the textbooks and it is encouraged to be used in the classroom.

- Students are more familiar with this form, but when the pronoun usted is present they tend to choose it showing native-like behavior drawing from the rules they already know or come with about the address forms.
5. Does personality influence the choice of address forms?

- Yes. For both tú and usted, personality of the character seem to influence the choice made by the participant both native and nonnative alike.
- The personality type of the nonnative participant seem to be also influential when the choice is the informal pronoun of address
  - When dealing with the formal pronoun, the place of birth of the nonnative participant seems to influence the choice of pronoun.
The questions now are...

- Can this knowledge be useful for the language teacher?
- Can instruments that were used for research serve a purpose in teaching? For teaching or for assessment? Or, for both?
- How do we guarantee respect to learners' personality and cultural background when teaching languages and cultures?
The learner and learning at the core

• The approach to acquisition here revolves around the following tenets:
  – The learner is the center of our endeavor
    • The teacher relinquishes their position of power and becomes a facilitator
  – The focus is entirely on language acquisition not the learning of content
    • Processes are assessed with solid knowledge of SLA acquisition processes
  – Remediation is done to help the learner take control of their own learning by helping them assess their own acquisition process
    • There is no competition, no student to student comparison, or prices for achieving the highest level. All learners are encouraged to be the best they can be regardless of what their peers can or cannot do.
  – All activities relate to real language use by learners
    • Using language for real communication and fulfilment of needs
Let’s build, learn, and discuss

• The elicitation instruments
  – The personality test
    • *Personality* was gathered using the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (FFI). The NEO-FFI measures five broad domains or factors of personality. The responses that a person gives to the statements about a person’s thoughts, feelings, and goals can be compared with those of other adults to give a description of that person’s personality (Costa & McCrae, 1999).
Let’s build, learn, and discuss

– The modified Discourse Completion Test (DCT)
  • an introduction to the characters and their description, which was given before the presentation of the scenarios. This introduction includes all three media types: audio, text, and video. This was created for the participants to be familiar with the names, the personalities and the characters themselves. It was also done to highlight any effect in participants’ choice that might have been influenced by the character personality.
  • the instrument is the situational scenarios, which were created by taking into consideration the degree of imposition in each of the questions to be asked. Each situation was introduced by a context that was in text and in audio form.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• Student Learning Outcomes must be designed with the acquisition process in mind.
  – We have moved from a Behaviorist approach to learning to a Constructivist approach to acquisition. Therefore, memorization of terms should not be one of our goals.
  – Performance and proficiency-based goals should be the norm in our classrooms.
    • The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages provides a set of guidelines of performance/proficiency-based description by levels.
    • The European Common Frame of Reference also provides a set of performance/proficiency guidelines. Whichever you choose to follow, use them as your guide to the language acquisition stages and, when possible, as your basis for establishing good SLOs.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• Aguilar-Sanchez (2015, 2016) recommends to answer the following questions when planning a learner/learning-centered lesson and its assessment:
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• The When:
  – SLOs can be set for a particular lesson, for a unit, or for a semester. The higher the level, the more generic they become. Ideally, we would have General Outcomes per level and a more specific one for each course or lesson. Therefore, the time framework is very important because it tells us when we want to assess learning.
  – The When is particularly important when creating Proficiency-based curricula because it provides the proficiency-levels, and it is not content-based. It also helps with the articulation of courses in a particular curriculum. In Content-based curriculum design, it helps to have the language SLOs clearly stated to articulate how the content of each course helps the language acquisition process. In other words, it helps with the sequencing and offering of content courses.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• The *What*:
  – determined by the proficiency level we want to achieve. It can be content-based (e.g. grammar, reading, writing, etc.), or it can be performance level (e.g. critical thinking, discourse strategies, sociolinguistic competence, etc.). This is the point at which Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) comes in handy.
  – The *What* is determined by the verb we choose. Verbs represent the observable and measurable behaviors we want from our learners. So, we have to choose them accordingly. If we choose a verb like “understand”, we will face the challenge of determining how a learner shows understanding (i.e., the observable behavior). But, if we choose a verb such as “pick”; we can easily picture and measure the behavior.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• The *How*:
  – is oftentimes neglected because of the belief that content trumps process. **The process through which we reach our goals is as important as the content we use.** The reason why the *How* is as important as the *What* stems from the necessity to collect data to determine progress in the acquisition process.
  – When data are collected systematically, facilitators are able to make informed decisions with regards to the class, the sequence of events, and the curriculum as a whole.
  – Data-driven decision-making is key to the implementation of this approach. Therefore, a good understanding of measurement and assessment is necessary to complete the cycle of learning.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• The Where: Context is very important for the implementation of the How because as it can provide great opportunities, it can also pose great limitations, especially when we talk about the adoption of technology.
Let’s bridge research and teaching

• As facilitators, we often brainstorm as to what tools will help us facilitate learning and how we go about measuring progress.
• Testing, sometimes disguised as assessment, has been the only tool language teachers use to measure achievement in the past.
  – Unfortunately, the focus has been solely on achievement and not on the process of acquisition. This is a key tenet to adopt to be able to move from a Behaviorist approach to learning to a Constructivist approach to second language acquisition.
  – As we all know, we over-rely on testing and tend to forget that assessment is the use of the data collected to help learners achieve goals by modifying our practice to meet their acquisition needs.
  – Although societal beliefs lean heavily on scales and numbers, our job is not just assigning a grade and moving on without regard to the learning process. On the contrary, all learners’ progress must be the focus of our planning.
Let’s collaborate

• Knowing what we know now about personality, SLO writing, and Assessment
  – How can we use the elicitation tasks used in Aguilar-Sanchez (forthcoming) and the guidelines in Aguilar-Sanchez (2015, 2016) in the language classroom.
  – Keep the following in mind:
    • Learners’ personality
    • Learners’ cultural background (regional or general)
    • Learners’ socio-economic background
    • Learners’ dialectal characteristics (how many dialects do you recognize in Costa Rican Spanish?, i.e. variation)
  – Think about or answer the following
    • reverse acquisition or de-acquisition (moving from a language with multiple pronouns of address to a language of one, what challenges does that pose to learners?)
    • What do we do with the data collected with these instruments?
    • Conclusions or products
Let’s Share

• Collaboration is a key for successful second language acquisition facilitation and assessment.
### Let’s compare

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Scientific Method</strong></th>
<th><strong>The facilitating/teaching process</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We learn what have been done before on the phenomenon of interest</td>
<td>We learn what has been done before (SLA) on the process of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>We ask a question or state a hypothesis</td>
<td>We contextualized the learning process we are interested in and propose a path (hypothesis)</td>
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<td>We create a construct to create instruments</td>
<td>We set a goal or create a language performance SLO (a construct)</td>
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<tr>
<td>We create instruments to elicit data</td>
<td>We create instruments to facilitate acquisition (elicit data)</td>
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<tr>
<td>We elicit and collect data</td>
<td>We assess (collect data)</td>
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<td>We analyze data in search of answers to our questions or to test our hypothesis (we work with the data)</td>
<td>We analyze data to see what learners can and cannot do to trace new paths (we work with the data)</td>
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<tr>
<td>We discuss our findings to propose future paths for research on the phenomenon (we close the loop and move forward)</td>
<td>We reflect on students’ performance to propose future steps to aid students in the acquisition of other features of language. (We close the loop and move forward)</td>
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Thank you very much!

• Final questions?
References