What is the Logical Problem of Foreign Language Learning?

Group:
Marianela Vargas
Maria José Ramos
Karen González
Yarlín Ríos
Introduction
The Fundamental Character of Foreign Language Learning

- 9 fundamental characteristics of adult foreign language learning.

- Large-scale characteristics

- Few controversial

- Adult foreign language learning = General adult learning
Lack of Success

- Lack of general guaranteed success: The most striking characteristic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal Children</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inevitable Perfect Mastery of Language</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theory: Learning is controlled by general human cognitive learning capacities rather than by the same domain – specific module which guarantees child success.
General Failure

- Complete success is rare or even nonexistent
  - Accent.
  - Ability to make subtle grammaticality judgments.

- Selinker “Interlanguage”: rare success could be regarded as peripheral to the enterprise of SLA theory.

- Adult-Child: Compare that the cases present the same “pathological” status
Variation in success, course, and strategy

- Variation on degree of success
- Fail in different degrees.
  - Evident (no formal academic study)
  - Basis of TOEFL.
  - Children present no variation
- Different learner = Different learning strategies

Expected in general adult skill acquisition
Variation in Goals

- Variation in type of attainment: General Problem Solving. Setting goals

- Some of the goals adults have are:
  - Communicate even with a “Pidginized” language.
  - Grammatical correctness – fluency.
  - Pronunciation – Grammar.
  - Vocabulary size.
  - Passing for a native speaker.
Fossilization

- Learners reach a stage of learning – short of success – and stabilize in it.
  - Level of competence ensures communicative success/grammar is not like a native.
- Children do not suffer Fossilization
Indeterminate Intuitions

- Grammaticality Judgments
- Knowledge systems produced in the first and foreign language
Importance of Instruction

- Hawthorne effect
- Importance of practice/general adult learning
Negative Evidence

- Useful
- Not always necessary
Role of Affective Factors

- Affect as a whole range of associated factors
- Correlation between affective factors and proficiency
The Logical Problem of Foreign Language Learning

- The same language acquisition system of children is not available to adults.

- Explaining the quite high level of competence that is possible in some cases.
The Logical Problem of Foreign Language Learning

- Language is a system underdetermined by the data of experience.

- The adult possesses knowledge faculties which are absent in the infant.

- The function of the innate domain acquisition system is filled in adults by their native language.
The Fundamental Difference Hypothesis

- Internal
- Linguistic
- Qualitative
Language Acquisition System of the Child Learner

- Universal Grammar
- Learning Procedure
Language Development

Children

- Universal grammar
- Domain-specific learning procedures

Adults

- Native language knowledge
- General-problem solving systems
The Role of the Native Language

- Language Universals
- Adult's knowledge of a language
The Role of the Native Language

- Foreign language learners may know more than children equipped with a general Universal Grammar.

- Adults construct a surrogate for Universal Grammar from knowledge of the native language.
The Nature of the General Problem-Solving Cognitive System

- According to Bley - Vroman:
  - “Language is a complicated abstract formal system and young children seem not to have the general cognitive capacity to deal with such systems” (p. 53)

- Piaget: “Formal operation”

Some characteristics of the adult cognitive problem solving are:

- Be goal oriented
- Feedback
- Instruction
- Understanding explanations
## The Nature of the General Problem-Solving Cognitive System

*Move from controlled to automatic processing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Vrs</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous knowledge of a language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Universal Grammar knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to deal with Abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning procedure to construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>designed formal system. grammars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alternative Explanations:

Child language development is different from adult foreign language learning because in adults, the language acquisition device ceases to operate, and that knowledge of first language and general problem solving serve as imperfect substitutes. (Bley-Vroman, 1989)

General approaches:

• The Fundamental Difference Hypothesis
• L1 Interference Hypothesis
• The input Hypothesis
• Affect or Socialization Hypothesis
• The Competing Cognitive System Hypothesis
Interference

“The basic problem of foreign language learning arise not out of any essential difficulty in the features of the new language themselves, but primarily out of the special “set” created by the first language habits” (Fries, 1957).

The Interference Hypothesis:

• Does not explain why children and adult ability are different.

• Third language learning seem to be less difficult than the second one.

• It is the previous knowledge and not the age what affects.
Input

Adults are to much less exposed to the foreign language input than an average child where the target language is spoken.

• Teachers.
• Children hear deals with the “here and now”
• Material

The input Hypothesis:
* A learner – internal filter prevents the input to which the learner is exposed from getting into the language acquisition device (LAD). (Krashen, 1982)
* It claims that LAD does not shut off, degenerate or stop at puberty.
* Children do not have such filter, or it is weak.
* What is this filter exactly???
Affect

“Child language development is not influenced by motivation, attitude, socialization, self image or ego” (Bley-Vroman, 1989).

• In the Affect Hypothesis children have a certain je ne sais quoi, absent in adults, which is crucial to language acquisition, je ne sais comment.

• The Affect Hypothesis may be combined with the filter Hypothesis.

• Affective states influence the strength of the filter. (Krashen, 1957)

• The ideas in this Hypothesis are not fully developed.
Competing Cognitive Systems

The Competing Cognitive Systems Hypothesis:

The Language-Specific Cognitive System (LSC) VS The Problem-Solving Cognitive System (PSC)

“Adult general problem solving gets in the way of a still functioning language acquisition system” (Felix 1982, 1985)
Language-Specific Cognitive System (LSC)

- Children’s age and abstract formal systems
  - LSC allows the child to come up with the formal properties of the language.
  - It is the only cognitive module capable of dealing with language.
Problem-Solving Cognitive System (PSC)

- Ability to deal with abstract formal systems.

- Onset of Piaget’s stage of formal operations.
Two ways to approach the processing of language data

- LSC or PSC

  - The Problem solving Cognitive System begins to compete with the Language-Specific Cognitive System.

  - PSC is not well-equipped
  - PSC is insuppressible

  =

  Adults fail to acquire languages
Degree of the Problem-Solving Cognitive System

- A strong PSC
- A weak PSC
Difficulties with the Proposal

- Formal operations --- good general problem solvers
- Poor language learners
- Worst language learners as professional linguistics?
- What about successful learners who are skilled systematic problem solvers?
- Motivation
- Timing. Case of mid-adolescents who move to a foreign country.
- Conceptual – evolution
Evidence for UG in Adult Foreign Language Learning

Several Lines of Research related to the nature of UG and language acquisition.

Three research questions:

1. Are learners languages constrained by UG?
   e.g. Koreans quite confused with anaphoric binding.

2. Do adults have access to UG-generated knowledge?
   e.g. Koreans –wh-movement – not consistency in UG.

3. Do properties “cluster” in adult-learned languages?
   - The investigation is just beginning.
Thank You!