

Chapter 10

The Major Developments of Learner Language From Second Language Acquisition to Learner Corpus Research

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ABSTRACT

Given the fact that there is a constant debate among monolingualists and pluralists, this chapter aims to explore the main developments in learner language. It focuses on the changes from second language research to learner corpus research. It is an attempt to present second language theories. Then, the chapter draws a particular attention to the limitations of second language acquisition. The discussion turns to learner corpus research to show how language changes from heterogeneity to diversity. Language is no longer seen as monolithic entity or a standard variety but a multilingual entity.

INTRODUCTION

Second Language researchers (Selinker, 1972; Han, 2005,2004; Ellis, 1994) see learner language as a deviation. According to them, Second language learners' competence depends on a continuum between the first language and the second language. If learners produce output different from Standard English, it is considered as an error. In this context, it has been claimed that L2 learners develop a unique linguistic system, different from both the first language and the target language (TL).

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This linguistic system is called approximative system (Nemser, 1971), idiosyncratic dialects or transitional dialects (Corder, 1971) and interlanguage (Selinker, 1972).

Cook (1993) further argues that “L2 learning only as a relationship between the L1 and the L2. A learner at a particular point in time is in fact using a language system that is neither the L1 nor the L2. Describing it in terms of the L1 and the L2 misses the distinctive features of L2 learning: “a third language system is involved –that of the L2 learner– which also needs to be described” (p. 17). The system of Learner language was investigated by many researchers and they tried to show the effect of these systems on the acquisition of the target language. Based on this perspective, there are different theories, namely the Contrastive Analysis theory, the Error Analysis theory and the Interlanguage theory. “The learner language is viewed as an independent social and psychological phenomenon...It is not a defective version of something else: a chrysalis is simply a chrysalis, not a deformed or defective butterfly” (Phillipson, et al., 1991, p. 61).

Learner Corpus Research studies show that learner language is a creation. They argue for the plural aspect of learner language. Learner Corpus Research has relations with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). Sridhar and Sridhar (1986) point out, “what is needed is a reevaluation of the applicability of SLA theories to the particular circumstances in which [World Englishes] are acquired” (p.4). They criticized second language acquisition research in particular and applied linguistics in general for relying on “the traditional monolingual conception of bilinguals as being two monolinguals rather than different people from monolinguals in L1” (Cook, 2013, pp. 37-38).

One of the main differences is that Second Language Acquisition studies concentrate on competence. Ellis (1994) states that “the main goal of SLA research is to characterize learners’ underlying knowledge of the L2, i.e. to describe and explain their competence” (p.13). Learner Corpus Research studies, on the other hand, focus on performance. Their main aim is to describe the use of language by learners in actual production.

The main objectives of this chapter are to review the major developmental stages of learner language, starting from second language acquisition to learner corpus research. It will also review the major theories in second language acquisition. Methodologically, the proposed study will present the different methodologies that appeared in the developmental stages of learner language. The majority of learner corpus studies are based on raw data. Learner corpora need to be authentic “gathered from the genuine communications of people going about their normal business” (Sinclair, 1996).

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