ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND FOREIGN-LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Three different, though closely related distinctions are made in applied linguistics today: the distinctions between language acquisition and language learning, between guided and unguided discovery, and between second-language acquisition (or learning) and foreign-language learning. The main difference between these three distinctions is that acquisition and learning refer to the learning process inside the learner, the degree of consciousness with which he learns,[1] whereas the other two refer to the prevailing situation in which learning takes place rather than to the learner himself. The distinction between guided and unguided discovery refers to the teacher's role, in that guided discovery entails some sort of teaching, in a classroom or by self-study whereby the learner is exposed to organized material, whereas the unguided discoverer is exposed to random samples of the language, on the basis of which he constructs his own hypotheses. The distinction between second-language acquisition (SLA) and foreign-language learning (FLL) also focuses on the prevailing learning situation, not directly on the learning process itself. Different criteria have been used for the distinction and they have been reviewed in a recent paper by Seshadri and Allen.

Should this distinction focus on the learner's community or on the individual learner and his immediate environment? In my view, the distinction between second-language acquisition and foreign-language learning is not a happy one, if it is made on the basis of "the political status of a language in a country and its functional role in the community."[2] This type of distinction only leads to a generalized description of the status of a language in a country, and the result may be quite misleading from the individual learner's point of view. Thus, Swedish in Finland is frequently taken as an example of a second language because of its official status.

[1] For the distinction between acquisition and learning, see various papers by Krashen, e.g. 1978. Cf. also Sajavaara 1979.

[2] Seshadri and Allen 1979: 67.

Yet, to most Finns Swedish is no less foreign than English or German. Only in (most of) the coastal areas is Swedish really a second language in Finland in the sense that there are people who speak Swedish in natural communication situations. The inevitable conclusion is that to Finnish learners Swedish is either a foreign or a second language (or, in some cases, indeed something between the two) depending on the particular environment where the learner happens to live. To disregard this fact by saying that Swedish is either a second language or a foreign language in Finland, full stop, shows a neglect of the individual learner which is not justifiable.

Unlike Paul Christophersen, then, who maintains[3] that the distinction between 'second' and 'foreign' becomes clearer if it is seen in relation not to the individual speaker but to the whole community of speakers, I believe that a generalization about the community confuses the issue, since it is a misguided attempt to put the same label on learners who may be in entirely different situations. My example of Swedish in Finland is, of course, not unique. There are countries with even more complex linguistic make-ups, like Switzerland, which even more blatantly defy simplistic definitions based on the official status of languages. We simply have to focus on the individual learner and his learning situation, since the status of a language as an official language affects different learners in entirely different ways.

Another criterion which has occasionally been used is level of achievement, but this certainly seems wholly inadequate. Second-language learners do not automatically reach a higher level of competence than foreign-language learners. There are too many other important variables that are relevant for success in learning.

However, I should not go as far as Seshadri and Allen. They maintain (1979:69) that the distinction between foreign language and second language actually has no basis in empirical fact. As long as we focus on the individual learner and not the community, there surely are differences between the two, differences to be sought in the context in which the individual learner learns the language. The basic issue, which is whether the language he learns is spoken in his immediate environment or not, might be summed up as follows:

In a second-language acquisition situation the language is spoken in the immediate environment of the learner, who has good opportunities to use

[3] Christophersen 1973: 30.

the language by participating in natural communication situations. Second-language acquisition may, or may not, be supplemented by classroom teaching.

In a foreign-language learning situation the language is not spoken in the immediate environment of the learner, although mass media may provide opportunities for practicing the receptive skills. The learner has little or no opportunity to use the language in natural communication situations.

Needless to say, and as in linguistics generally, a dual distinction is an oversimplification. Two points on a scale are selected to illustrate opposites, where in actual fact there is a continuum. But my distinction is not intended to be hard and fast, and there are certainly borderline cases. In a bilingual community one language may be spoken only by a minority and would therefore be infrequently heard. In such cases learners even in the same classroom may differ a great deal from one another, depending on their contacts with the language being learnt. Some, often the majority, might be foreign-language learners, others second-language learners (or acquirers), but a few borderline cases would probably occur as well. In Table 1 I have outlined what these situational differences are between foreign-language learning and second-language acquisition, and Table 2 will show the effect of these differences on variables pertaining to the individual.

TABLE 1. Situational Differences between SLA and FLL.

Variable	SLA	FLL
1. Time	More time is spent on acquisition.	Less time can be spent on learning.
2. Input	Compared to FLL, the input is rich and varied. The learner is exposed to samples of language which are little organized.	The learner is exposed to highly structured, selected and sequenced input.
3. Teacher's role	Mainly unguided discovery: acquisition from peers, possibly supplemented by classroom teaching.	Guided discovery: the learning mainly takes place in artificial classroom situations and/or by study at home. Little or hardly any learning from peers.
4. Skills	A genuine need for oral communication exists: the oral skills are all-important. Comprehension of natural speech is particularly important from the very beginning.	The dependence on written material in an average classroom situation and the absence of a genuine need for communication make oral skills less important. The sequencing of skills depends on the aims and the methods of the course.

TABLE 2. Learner Differences

Variable	SLA	FLL
1. Motivation	Frequently integrative motivation because of genuine communicative need. Language is a key to social and cultural enrichment.	Mainly instrumental motivation (language is generally felt to be studied for an immediate short-term goal).
2. Activity and language shock	The learner is usually forced to be creative and active: he has to consider saliency, deciding on exactly what features of the input he selects for his intake. The burden of this and, in general, language shock[6] may put some learners off.	The learner's attitude to learning can be passive: saliency is largely decided by variables outside the learner (teacher, syllabus, method). Language shock is mitigated by gradual and limited input and by the simple nature of the communicative tasks the learner is required to perform.
3. Social and affective factors	Social and affective variables, esp. attitudes to the target language (which tend to reflect attitudes to speakers of that language) influence acquisition very strongly. The status, prestige and the extent of use of the target language are also important.[7]	Most social and affective factors lose at least some of their importance, since the learner is not involved in the same way as the SL-learner.
4. Age	Favourable for young learners, who may reach native competence and for whom exposure is all-important. Exposure alone is not sufficient for adults,[8] who may more easily neglect converting input to intake.	Adults are better able than children to profit from formal study.
5. L_1-background	Probably less L_1-transfer (positive and negative), especially in children, whose L_1-competence is less firmly rooted than in adults. A related L_1 helps a great deal, since the receptive skills are acquired quite quickly. The organizational problems[9] of beginning learners are fairly easily mastered by learners with a related L_1.	Probably more L_1-transfer, esp. in adults. A related L_1 helps, but not to the same extent as in SLA.[10]

[6] "In experiencing language shock ..., the learner is haunted by doubts as to whether his words accurately reflect his ideas. In addition, he is sometimes confronted with target language words and expressions which carry with them images and meanings which he interprets differently than do native speakers of the target language. Also, the narcissistic gratification to which the learner is accustomed in the use of his native language is lost when he attempts to speak the target language. Finally, when speaking the second language the learner has apprehensions about appearing comic, child-like and dependent." (Schumann 1976b, 401.)

[7] See Schumann 1975, Schumann 1976a.

[8] Cf. e.g. Krashen and Seliger 1975.

[9] Learners have basically two different types of problems, especially grammatical problems to cope with: organizational problems and choice problems. At the early stages of learning, they have little knowledge of how the other language is organized. They have not yet reached the stage of having choice problems, in the sense of choosing between well-defined and understandably organized alternatives, since this stage presupposes a basic knowledge of what alternatives to choose from. Cf. Galanter 1966, Ringbom 1978c.

[10] See Ringbom 1978a, Ringbom 1978b.

Variable	SLA	FLL
6. Learning process	Language acquired rather than learnt. Learners generally achieve automated skills[11] at least in some restricted registers. Learners tend to work on a trial-and-error basis, since they have good opportunities to test their hypotheses.	Learning is largely the result of conscioun effort. Skills are not as easily automated. Limited time devoted to learning and fewer opportunities to practice make for less use of trial-and-error method.
7. Monitoring	Probably less monitoring[12] because of time pressure and the fact that feedback generally refers to content and communicative success/failure. Little feedback in the form of error correction.	Probably more monitoring because of the presence of frequent feedback in the form of error correction and rule isolation (one grammatical rule introduced at a time).
8. Result	Sufficient vocabulary for different communicative contexts more important than grammatical correctness. Language functions as a key to real social contacts: communicative competence generally achieved. Success or failure of acquisition often has social consequences for the learner.	In practice, linguistic competence rather than communicative competence is in the foreground. Grammar and correctness more stressed than possession of extensive vocabulary. Communicative competence is far from always achieved, even after several years of study. Not the same social consequences of success or failure in learning.
9. The good learner	Requirements: outgoing personality, strong desire to communicate, willing and accurate guesser. People who frequently initiate interactions with native speakers tend to be good learners, as opposed to those who basically speak only when spoken to.[13] Success measured by degree of nativeness and ability to cope in communicative situations.	General learning ability important (intelligence, patience, conscientiousness, memory). In practice, success often measured by the ability to pass tests, which is not the same as communicative competence.
10. Communicative strategies	Larger variety of communicative strategies[14] used, since the learner is frequently in situations where his competence is inssuficient.	Not as many different communicative strategies used.

[11] See Levelt 1977.

[12] For the monitor model, see Krashen 1978 and Sajavaara 1978.

[13] Cf. Seliger 1977, who speaks about HIGs (High Input Genrators) and LIGs (Low Input Generators), and Tarone 1979.

[14] See Tarone 1979.

Whenever we talk about language learning, the issue is complicated by the very large number of variables that affect it. Even within the second-language acquisition situation a great many differences exist, depending above all on whether the learner is a migrant to another country or learns the language in his own familiar, bilingual environment. Yet another situation is found in the learning of English (or French) in multilingual states which were former colonies of Britain or France, and where English or French, though not the mother tongue of any group within the country, still has an internal social function.

Situational variables are not the only type of variables; there are also learner variables. And there is, of course, a considerable influence of these situational variables on the learners. In Table 2 I have tentatively outlined how the learner and the learning process might be affected by the situational differences between foreign-language learning and second-language acquisition. The foreign-language learning situation has here been generalized to refer to the normal classroom situation in countries such as Finland, where teaching in practice certainly tends to focus on linguistic competence rather than communicative competence.

Oversimplification is inevitable when complex matters are presented in table form, but the necessary elaboration and clarification of these issues (what is, after all, "intelligence", for example?) would require a much wider framework than the present. Nevertheless, I shall have achieved my aim if I have been able to persuade my readers that the distinction between second-language acquisition and foreign-language learning is an important one, and that this distinction should be made on the basis of how the different learning situations affect learners differently.

Since, at least for young learners, second-language acquisition produces better results than foreign-language learning, an obvious question is what foreign-language learning might gain from second-language acquisition. An answer which has been given many times before and which was also given in Norman Davies's paper at this conference is that the teaching should create more meaningful communicative activities, intake-rich environments in Krashen's terms.[4] This, of course, is not the same as automatically generalizing results achieved in investigations of second-

[4] Krashen 1978: 20.

[5] I am grateful to Kari Sajavaara for a number of helpful comments on this paper. Roger Sell and three participants in the conference, Nils Erik Enkvist, Kjell Madsen and Kay Wikberg, also gave valuable comments on some of the points touched upon.

language acquisition so as to apply to foreign-language learning situations and vice versa. Such generalizations are very dangerous. In language learning we have to consider so many different interlinking variables that linguists must control their desire to generalize their own or other scholars' results by applying them to a wider context than the limited number of learners that can be investigated in one research project.

In this paper I have emphasized the differences between second-language acquisition and foreign-language learning and have not dealt with the similarities that also undoubtedly exist. The differences I have outlined may not produce entirely different learning processes in these two types of learners (some element of acquisition will also be present in the foreign-language learning situation, for example), but they influence the learners in different ways, so that one group of learners tend to show common individual deviations from a general learning pattern which the other group lacks. The emphasis I have placed on the individual and on the large number of variables relevant to the learning process stresses the fact that each learner is to some extent unique in his learning of another language. Today, when supposedly universal aspects so often are in the foreground of linguistic research, this uniqueness needs to be stressed. It is, needless to say, nothing new to the experienced language teacher.[5]

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