Multi-Perspective of Second Language Teaching and Learning

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English the co-official language in India is taught as the second language in Indian schools. Despite longer period of exposure to the language from early childhood, majority of the students lack communicative competence. This may be due to various reasons: lack of appropriate curriculum, lack of sufficient motivation in students and inefficiency of language teachers. However when the students with varied aptitude and background enter college, they are categorized together and taught using same methodology.

Second language Acquisition involves a range of language learning settings, learner characteristics and circumstances. Linguistic, psychological, and social background of a student influences the way a student acquires the language. These factors play a significant role in both learning and teaching process. Thereby it is the responsibility of the teachers to take into account the individual differences in learning and design an appropriate strategy to cater to the needs of the students. The concern of this paper is to delineate how learners vary as individuals. And to analyse whether it is best to stream-line students according to their aptitude level and learning style. Addressing this issue Vivian Cook (1991) in his book *Second Language Learning and Language Teachin*g has remarked "Teachers usually have to deal with students in groups rather than as individuals; it is what all the class do that is important. However, ultimately language is not learnt by groups, but by individuals. At the end of the class, the group turns into 25 individuals who go off to use the language as they will." The most common and much debated question which arise concerning Second Language acquisition is why some learners are more (or less) successful than the others. This basic question can be answered only

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if the learners and learning process is looked at from a linguistic, psychological and social perspective.

LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Since the middle of twentieth century several linguistic approaches have heavily influenced the study of second language acquisition. Many of the early linguistic approaches are based on the assumption, that the ability to use a language requires a complex of knowledge and skills that is automatically available to everyone when they acquire L1 as a child. Contrastive analysis of 1940s and1960s is a systematic study which involves predicting and explaining learner problems based on a comparison of L1 and L2 to determine similarities and differences. Robert Lado,(1957) an exemplary applied linguist, in his pioneering work on Contrastive analysis, *Linguistics Across Culture* (1957), states, "We can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty in learning, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. In our view, the preparation of up-to- date pedagogical and experimental materials must be based on this kind of comparison." The goal of Contrastive Analysis focuses on learner's internal creative ability to construct language. This innate language is in what Chomsky calls the Language faculty, which is "a component of human mind, physically represented in the brain and part of the biological endowment of the species."(Chomsky, 2008)

Error analysis which replaced Contrastive Analysis by the early 1970s is based on the description and analysis of actual learner errors in L2. The most influential publication launching Error analysis as a linguistic approach in second language acquisition was S.Pit Corder's article on "The significance of learner's errors." In the article Corder claimed that errors as sources of insight in the learning processes. In a sense, errors are windows into the language learners mind. In 1980s Noam Chomsky created a revolutionary impact on the study of second language acquisition with his introduction of Transformational- Generative grammar. Chomsky claimed

that languages have only a relatively small number of essential rules which account for their basic sentence structure, plus a limited set of transformational rules which allow these basic sentences to be modified (by deletions, additions, substitutions, and changes in word order.) The finite number of basic rules and transformation in any language accounts for an infinite number of possible grammatical utterances. Chomsky claimed that competence in one's native language can be accounted for only by innate knowledge that the human species is genetically endowed with. He argued that children already posses general knowledge of what all languages have in common, while they come to the process of acquiring a second language. What all languages have in common is Universal grammar. This innate knowledge is described by Chomsky metaphorically as Language Acquisition Device (LAD).

Muriel Saville Troike lists out the following possibilities within universal grammar framework as an attempt to analyze the differences in learners.

➢ All learners may not have the same degree of access to Universal grammar.
➢ Different relationships between various L1s and L2s may result in differential transfer or interference
➢ Some learners may receive qualitatively different L2 input from others
➢ Some learners may be more perceptive than others of mismatches between L2 input and existing L1 parameter settings.

Thus linguistic approaches seem to be centered on factors which are largely internal to language and mind.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The basic question of why some learners are more successful than others leads to the examination of psychological differences among the learners. According to psychological approaches, language learning outcomes are influenced by age, aptitude, sex, motivation, personality, cognitive style, and learning strategies. It is a common belief that children are more

successful L2 learners than adults, but there seems to be an apparent inconsistency in research findings. Vivian Cook says, "At particular ages students prefer particular methods. Teenagers may dislike any technique that exposed them in public; role-play and simulation are in conflict with their adolescent anxieties. Adults can feel they are not learning properly in play –like situations and prefer a conventional formal style of teaching… adults learn better than children from the 'childish' activities of total physical response- if you can get them to join in!"(Vivian cook, 1991)

Age difference in SLA

Younger – advantage	Older – advantage
▪ Brain plasticity ▪ Not analytical ▪ Fewer inhibition ▪ Weaker group identity ▪ Simplified input	▪ Learning capacity ▪ Analytical ability ▪ Pragmatic skills ▪ Creative knowledge of L1 ▪ Real-world knowledge

* Simplified table by Saville-Troike, M. (2006)

It is a common belief that some people have more aptitude for learning second language than others. The following four factors were proposed by Caroll (1965) as the basis of aptitude.

I. **Phonemic coding ability**: Capacity to use phonetic script to distinguish phonemes in the language.

II. **Grammatical Sensitivity:** recognize grammatical functions

III. **Inductive Language Learning ability**: infer structure, identify patterns, make generalizations.

IV. **Associative Memory capacity**: ability to store and recall linguistic items.

Motivation largely determines the amount of effort which learners put in to achieve proficiency in second language. High motivation results in successful mastery of the language. Lambert and Gardner were the linguist who introduced the two types of motivation – integrative and instrumental motivation. And Vivian Cook (1991) urges the language teachers to be "aware of the reservations and preconceptions of their students. What they think of the teacher and what they think of the course heavily affect their success. This is what the teachers can influence…"

Cognitive style refers to individuals preferred way of perceiving, conceptualizing, organizing and recalling information. Field- dependent and field independent are two styles of thinking originally introduced by Witkin.et.al. Field dependent students thinking relates to their surroundings. Whereas Field-independent students think independently of their surroundings. Field independent students seem to be more successful in communicative tasks than the Field-dependent students (Hansen & Stansfield, 1981). Personality factors influences the learning style of the students. It is generally believed that sociable and gregarious students are able to learn L2 better than reserved, shy and reticent learners. Rossier (1976) found a link between extroversion and oral fluency. Some SLA researchers have hypothesized that extroverts would be more successful language learners, but there is no clear support for the advantage of either type.

The behaviors and techniques the learners adopt in their efforts to learn a second language, is defined as learning strategies. Even though the strategies may be influenced by the affective factors (attitude, motivation, age, sex, personality and cognitive style.) it is most often a conscious choice on the part of the learners. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have defined three main types of strategy used by L2 students:

1. Metacognitive: previewing a concept or principle in anticipation of a learning activity; deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of input; rehearsing linguistic components which will be required for an upcoming language tasks; self monitoring of progress and knowledge states.

2. Cognitive: repeating after a language model: translating from L1; remembering a new word on L2 by relating it to one that sounds the same in L1, or by creating vivid images; guessing meaning of new materials through inferencing.

3. Social/affective: seeking opportunities to interact with native speakers;working cooperatively with peers to obtain feedback or pool information; asking questions to obtain clarification; requesting repetition, explanation or examples.

Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todsco (1978) studied people who were good at learning languages and based on that results formulated six good language learner strategies:

1) Find a learning style that suits you.
2) Involve yourself in the language learning process.
3) Develop an awareness of language both as system and as communication.
4) Pay constant attention to expanding your language knowledge.
5) Develop the L2 as a separate system.
6) Take into account the demands L2 learning imposes.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Humans are inherently social creatures and it would be incomplete analysis of individual differences of learners if the influence of learner's social background is not taken into account. People are categorized according to their age, sex, ethnicity, education level, occupation and economic status. Such categorization influences "what experiences they have, how they are perceived by others, and what is expected of them. When they are L2 learners, members of different social categories frequently experience different learning conditions, and different attitudes or perceptions from within both native and target language communities (Muriel

Saville-Troike, 2006). Age and sex are both biological and sociological factors affecting Second language learning. Gonzalez (1986) and Cummins (1981) state in their separate individual researches that, young immigrant children appear to do less well in L2 learning than children who immigrate and begin L2 learning at an older age. The different attitudes and learning conditions experienced by males and females in different societies may advantage one group over the other. But neither male nor female group has an innate advantage. Willet (1995) in his study found that girls learn L2 better in a traditional classroom setting than boys. When compared to girls boys tend to learn L2 faster through free social interaction and cultural experiences. Female students quite easily adopt the more formal and refined language due to social constraints and restriction which are forced on them. The socially constructed attitudes from within the native and target communities as a result of historical, social boundaries and identities, has a major influence on second language acquisition. It is widely perceived by many of the researchers that ethnic groups which has cultural congruence with the target language community is more likely to learn the language quite willingly. Miller (2000) in her study of migrant high school students in Australia found that European students established friendships and assimilated more readily with Australian students than with students form Asia.

The circumstances of learning at home particularly at the age of five or six, play a significant role in second language acquisition. The child unconsciously internalizes the native culture, values and beliefs at his early age. The Asian students have the uncommon capacity for rote learning, as they have had more exposure to teaching methods that involves memorization. Chinese students seem to outdo Europeans on tests that measure memory for numbers, which reflects on Chinese students' prior

native educational experience with numbers at early stages of their schooling. Another fundamental difference in situational circumstances is the economical status of the learner. The affluent L2 learners have the opportunity to interact with speakers of target language, as they may live in a multilingual society or their lifestyle involves international travel and residence for

business or pleasure. However, majority of L2 learners have access to second language only as a formal academic subject in educational institutions.

L2 learning usually takes place in social situation where people interact with each other, whether in the society or inside the classroom. Robert Gardner (1985) to explain the interaction between individual factors and society has introduced socio-Educational model. According to Robert Gardner, motivation and aptitude are the two key ingredients in the learners' success. Motivation, in Gardner's model, is said to consist of 2 main factors: attitudes to learning situation and integrativeness.

Gardner's Socio-Educational model of L2 Learning

Integrativeness. ⟶ Motivation ⎫

                      ⟶ L2 Success

Attitudes to ⟶ Aptitude ⎭
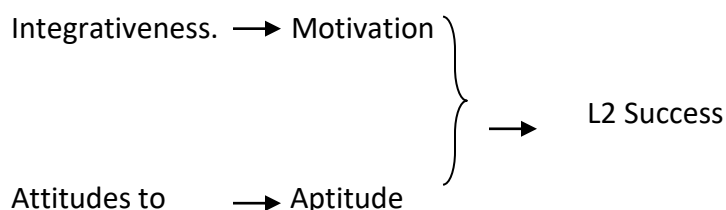
Learning situations

(Simplified by Vivian Cook)

Integrativeness is about how the second language learner perceives the culture reflected in L2. And attitudes to learning situations involve the role of the teacher and the course. Both attitudes and integrativesness originate from the social milieu in which the students are placed. Every society has its own strange and stereotyped views about particular nation, its culture and language. This outlook affects the L2 learning. Hence to succeed in L2 learning Gardner recommends to look at the attitudes of the society and the parents of the L2 learners instead of students themselves.

John Schumann (1978) has proposed a complimentary approach called the Acculturation Model. It is necessary to cross the cultural boundary to participate in another

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language community. The process of learning the culture of the target language and adapting to those values and behavioral patterns is called Acculturation. If a learner considers his culture as superior or inferior to the culture of the target language, he or she will not learn the language in a satisfactory manner. Lambert (1974) distinguishes between additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism. In additive bilingualism the learners feel that by getting to know a new language they are adding to their knowledge and skills. In subtractive bilingualism the learner fears loss of ethnic or native identity and imagines they may lose what they have already learnt in L1 related to this Vivian Cook (1991) states, "some Chilean refugees I taught in 1970s often lamented their lack of progress in English. However much they consciously wanted to learn English, subconsciously they saw it as committing themselves to permanent exile and thus to subtracting from themselves as Chileans."

Individual differences in learners have been looked upon from three dimensions: linguistic, psychological & social. It is widely believed that some people have a knack for learning second languages and others are poor in it. Having argued on this fact it is necessary for the language teachers to categorize students according to their overall ability. One way of measuring overall ability is to build a test with a number of components, for example, reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary. Language abilities are not easy to measure, and "we cannot expect a level of accuracy comparable to those of measurement in physical sciences." (Arthur Hughes, 2005) Proficiency test should be conducted all students who enter into collegiate education. Proficiency tests are designed to measure people's ability in a language regardless of any training they may have had in that language.

Once the students have been tested for proficiency, students can be streamlined into different classes according to their level of proficiency like advanced, intermediate, and slow learners. If one or two students are misplaced by the test, they can be promoted or moved to the more appropriate class. The Graded Objective Movement in England has set the same overall goal for all students at each stage, but allowed them different periods of time for getting

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there. (Harding et al., 1981) The advantage in stream -lining students according to their proficiency is appropriate teaching methodologies can be adopted for different levels of students. For instance, academic style of language teaching can be adopted for high- fliers. The audio-lingual style of language teaching is better suited for slow learners. It emphasis is on teaching the spoken language through dialogues and drills. A typical lesson in audio-lingual style starts with a dialogue. The language in the dialogue is controlled so that it introduces only a few new vocabulary items and structures. Thus by stream-lining students, the teacher can concentrate more on slow learners, device good strategies for intermediate students and also give challenging tasks to advanced learners. In this mode the need of the students from different levels can be catered to in a very effective way.

Thus an understanding of second language acquisition can improve the ability of the language teacher to serve the psychologically and sociologically diverse students in their classrooms.

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