

# 第二语言习得概论

An Introduction to Second  
Language Acquisition

车宁薇◎编著



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本书是作者针对自己教授语言学课程中所遇到的问题而编写的。作者在教学过程中，总会从不同的专著中摘录有关二语习得研究各个方面的资料复印给学生。各专著语言难易程度不同、语言风格不同、侧重点不同，这对于缺乏足够的二语习得基础知识的学生来说往往产生理解困难。另外，由于摘录材料的系统性不强，也难以使学生对二语习得形成较为完整的认识，客观上阻碍了学生的学习积极性。鉴于此，作者根据自己的教学经验对二语习得理论的各个研究方面进行了选择，确定了本书各章节的重点，在此基础上以作者本人多年的读书笔记和教案为蓝本进行编撰。

全书由一个总纲性的序言和六个章节组成。在序言中，作者主要介绍了二语习得领域的关键词汇以及研究二语习得的常用方法。第一章主要涉及语言输入，通过介绍和分析有关语言输入的各种假说来阐述语言输入在二语习得中的地位、有效语言输入的必要条件、不同方式的语言输入对二语习得的影响、语言输入和语言输出的关系等问题。第二章着



重于学习者的母语对二语习得的影响，并对相关的理论、假设、实验进行了分析。第三章是对普遍语法的介绍，通过分析普遍语法对于语言的制约作用来阐述普遍语法和语言习得的关系。第四章是对学习者个体差异的分析，涉及到学习者的语言背景、年龄、性别、学习动机等方面的差异以及这些差异对于二语习得中发音、词汇、句法、语意、篇章等方面的影响。第五章重点阐述学习者采用不同的学习策略对二语使用、二语输入的接收、二语交际等方面的影响，并介绍了研究学习策略的常用方法。第六章介绍和评价了课堂语言教学的特点、常用方式以及教学理论等内容，并对课堂语言教学在二语习得中的作用进行了分析。

值此出版之际，谨向倡导和扶持学术研究的北京第二外国语学院继续教育学院院长王颖教授深表谢意。马壮寰教授一直以来给予了本人莫大的学习指导，马登阁教授、陆志保教授在百忙之中对本书进行了审阅并提出了中肯的建议。没有他们的鼓励 and 大力支持，这本书是不可能如期完成的。希望这本书能够帮助英语专业及对二语习得有兴趣的教师和学生掌握二语习得的基本原则和理论，或者解决他们在语言教学和学习中出现的一些实际问题。



## PRE FACE

This book developed from a concern that arose when I had to choose from a number of books on the basic theories and fundamental principles of second language acquisition. The necessity to provide the students with basic and systematic knowledge as well as to stimulate their interest in this course motivated me to take the responsibility to draft a book suitable for students whose theoretical knowledge in language acquisition has not yet matched their immense interest.

The book includes an introduction, in which the basic terms in language learning and acquisition and the general approaches to language studies are introduced. This is followed by six chapters in which a series of problems are tackled, including the nature of language acquisition and the external and internal factors affecting language acquisition, the roles of classroom and naturalistic settings, and



individual learner differences in terms of their approaches to language acquisition, learning strategies, and personal factors. All these chapters are about the basic issues of language acquisition and learning.

My gratitude goes to Professor Wang Ying, Dean of the Continuing Education Department of BISU, who encouraged me to use the early draft of this book in my classes and supported me throughout the preparation and publishing of this book. I would especially like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Ma Zhuanghuan for his helpful inspiration and wise comments on both my study of language acquisition and the draft of this book. Equal thanks also go to Professor Ma Dengge and Professor Lu Zhibao for their careful reading and valuable suggestions.

The content of this book owes a great deal to many professionals in this field whose names and books are listed in bibliography.

If the book can make any modest contribution to foreign language teachers and students to build up an understanding of language acquisition or to inspire further studies and discussions about second language acquisition, it will be thanks to them.

Che Ningwei  
April 2006



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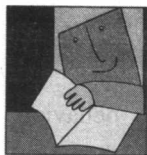
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# INTRODUCTION

## An Overview of Language and Language Acquisition

The study on second language acquisition (SLA/L2 acquisition), which took place around the 1960s, has been developed into “a rather amorphous field of study with elastic boundaries” (Ellis 1997: 2) within which linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social factors get involved. Quite a lot of efforts have been made in describing the characteristics of the second language (L2), seeking for the internal and external determinants for the development of SLA, and constructing and testing theoretical hypotheses and models for SLA. This book attempts to present an account of what has generally been known about SLA and of some major issues that have aroused a growing interest in SLA studies.



### UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE

People live in a world of words. They listen to others and invite more talks through their responses. Language provides them with so easy an access to communication and exchange of information that it has for long been taken for granted. On the other hand, language is something so complex that it can hardly be fully performed by any of its speakers. But what does



language — an integral part of our life — mean and what does it mean to know a language?

First of all, language is a matter of individual behavior. People speak and write what they intend to convey, they read and hear what is expressed to them, and they may suffer from misunderstanding if they don't acquire the knowledge required by and the skills of communication in language.

Apart from the observable speech behaviors, some internal mechanisms operate the production and the understanding of speeches. In this sense, language relates with the functions of the mind. People are in possession of a genetically determined innate capacity for language learning, but not with specific language skills that can be acquired and developed to different degrees. In other word, language is not only concerned with general human cognitive systems and psychological mechanisms which underlie language performance, that is, the comprehension and production of speech, but also how language speakers go through the process of acquiring the skills and knowledge required for language performance.

Besides, language is a social phenomenon. The principal function of language is communication. A speaker understands and is understood due to not only the common linguistic characteristics of the language shared by both the speaker and the hearer, but also the same conventions, including their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge of the world, etc.. Language must be responsive to different social situations and the speaker's freedom of the choice of words, structures and styles is actually within a limitation of the conventional system. In other word, both the speaker and his audience agree on "a set of 'agreed' ways of behaving" (Corder 1973: 25). Language is in this sense



a socially conditioned and culturally determined phenomenon, which is inseparable from the traditions and values in a society or community, which govern its members' usage of language and guarantee the smooth language communication among its members.

From the viewpoint of linguists, language is an object of study, whose entities and the relations among the entities can be explicitly observed and precisely described. On the basis of the knowledge taken from scientific observation and description, the grammar of a particular language and the way to evaluate a grammar are provided. In this aspect, language is studied "for its own sake" (Saussure 1960).



## UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Among a number of terms essential to the understanding and examining of SLA, the distinction of acquisition and learning should first of all be explained.

In Krashen's (1981) five hypotheses for language acquisition, acquisition-learning distinction lies at the core. Language learning refers to conscious knowledge of a language and the conscious use of language rules. In contrast, acquisition of a language occurs when the focus is on meaning, that is, when language is used for communication subconsciously. Accordingly, SLA is the process of the subconscious development of a person's second (or foreign language) in a natural setting, in which both the native speakers and learners aim at meaning exchange which preconditions the subconsciousness of language use.

Krashen's acquisition-learning distinction is not favored by



all linguists, and acquisition being subconscious is still far from being defined clearly enough. Therefore, there is reason not to rigidly adopt the learning-acquisition distinction in his book and both terms, if without explicit reference, will be used interchangeably, which will be advantageous in comparing relevant theories and study results whose investigators may or may not have employed the acquisition-learning distinction.

### First language acquisition, second language acquisition, and foreign language acquisition

The processes of first language acquisition (L1 acquisition) and L2 are both interrelated with and different from each other. All children whose physical and mental capacities are normal acquire their mother tongue naturally and gradually. L2 acquisition, generally speaking, takes place when the learners have been possessed of some knowledge and skills in their mother tongue; L2 is something additional. Since both the native language and target language get involved in L2 acquisition process, the influence of the acquired language-native language must thus be taken into consideration. L2 acquisition can either be a “pick-up” process along which learners gradually acquired L2 through their communication with native speakers or other L2 learners, or a classroom activity in which learners have access to both L2 knowledge and the guidance from reference books or formal instruction.

In short, L2 acquisition is put forward in contrast to L1 acquisition. It is the process for the learners who have acquired their native language to acquire an additional language system. But L2 acquisition does not stand in contrast with foreign language acquisition; it is often used as a general term to refer



to the process of acquiring any language other than the native language.

But if language learning settings are emphasized, L2 acquisition and foreign language acquisition can be of difference. L2 may refer to the language used as a recognized means of communication among some community members who speak some other language as their mother language, while foreign language plays no major role in the community and is primarily learnt in the classroom. In this book, L2 is generally employed to be in contrast to L1, indicating any language other than native language.



## COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE

The requirement of defining language as an object that can be studied scientifically necessitates separating the heterogeneous individual manifestations of language from its collective system. The distinction between competence and performance (Chomsky 1965) was put forward to meet the requirement and helps to identify the nature of language data, through the analysis of which researchers investigate SLA process and on which they build up SLA theory.

### The distinction between competence and performance

According to Chomsky (1965), competence is what the speaker knows about language. It is the ideal language user's knowledge of rules of a language. Competence is stable and abstract and is embodied in actual language use—performance.



Competence can be subdivided into grammatical and communicative competence. The former enables the speaker to identify grammatical sentences, to recognize relationships between sentences, and to allow the speaker the potential to understand and produce utterances that he may never find either opportunity to understand or to produce. Communicative competence, "the speaking rules" named by Hymes (cited in Ellis 1985), includes something beyond language itself; it helps the speaker to recognize which is appropriate in different contexts and to talk coherently and to the point.

Performance, the speaker's actual language behavior and the actual realization of competence, is a limited ability in both production and comprehension. Due to some physiological and psychological reasons, such as pressure, anxiety, or embarrassment, it is impossible for the speaker to fully employ and exhaust all the possible language entities or to use language correctly all the time. The speaker may run out of breath, lose track of what he originally intends to say, make unnecessary pauses, or even commit errors because of his carelessness or slip of the tongue.

## The object of language acquisition investigation

Performance is impossible without competence, therefore linguists describe competence first and foremost. The object of language study is the ideal speaker's competence which consists of a set of rules that can be applied to generate or understand language sentences, including the ones the speaker has never heard or used before or will not hear or use in the future. Competence is stable, which makes it possible to be investigated; on the other hand, competence is abstract. Since there is no direct





access to competence, only through performance can research be done. Therefore, the task of SLA research is to discover the characteristics of the development of L2 competence based on the data observed from the speaker's performance. There is no denying of the necessity to examine how the learner's performance reflects the internal L2 system.

But there is disagreement on what kind of performance can be the best evidence of acquisition. Some researchers work with the learner's production data while others work with the learner's intuitions or retrospections about L2; some take the first appearance of a language feature as a signal for acquisition while others take the achievement of a predetermined criterion level of accuracy, usually 90% (Ellis 1997), as a milestone for acquisition.

Due to the different interpretations and criteria for acquisition, difficulty comes up in the comparison of the study results. Therefore, before jumping to the conclusion or hastening to use the results shown in different study contexts, researchers have to take into consideration the nature of the data and the way in which acquisition is measured.



## THE APPROACHES TO SLA

### Inductive vs. deductive methodology

An inductive theory arises from empirical observations and consists of a set of laws that describe the data and are discovered from or built up on the data. The components of the theory form a network of relations and the components of low-level or intermediate-level precondition the ones of advanced level. In short, the inductive method is advantageous in that it stays close

